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BARBARA

LADY'S MAID
AND PEERESS

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER



KD 2834

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BARBARA

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BY

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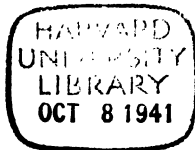


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BARBARA

CHAPTER I.

WHAT between my apprenticeship and my engagement as first "skirt hand" I was nearly six years with Madame Clothilde; and though in the season work was hard and hours long, I don't think any of us girls had very much to complain of. Madame had a temper, I must admit; but she had a heart, too. Many a day when she had chivied and driven us, not to say sworn at us (for her language could be strong sometimes), she would send up a big tray with sandwiches and biscuits and nice hot comforting coffee, just as we were all but fainting.

Anyway, she gave me every opportunity to improve myself, for she saw I was anxious to get on.

When I had turned twenty, however, I had got a little tired of "all work and no play;" so when father said he would give me sixty pounds to start me in a business of my own, I asked time to think about it.

Of course I was very thankful to father; more especially because I never believed he cared much about me. The two boys were his pets.

I was not particularly fond of him. Mother was enough for me. She was good and kind and thoughtful. So when she

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told me what father was ready to give me, I couldn't help crying a little.

"To think that he should be so generous to a girl he isn't fond of!" I said. "Though I am an only daughter."

"Don't say that, Barbara," cried mother. "He has your true interest at heart. So you just think well what you will do."

That night I couldn't sleep a wink. I was fighting with a longing I had for a holiday,—a change of some sort. I knew I was idle and self-indulgent, but I was so sick of the omnibuses and the streets, the dress and the drive to match silks and trimmings, that although I knew that now was my time to provide for old age, and that I was no beauty nor the sort of girl a man would care to work for, I could not make up my mind to go into business on my own account.

Next day was Saturday, and I got home to tea with mother. It was early spring, just growing warm, and by the time I had climbed up to our rooms (father was caretaker and messenger to a big firm in Bucklersburg, and we had the top story; of course mother did the caretaking), by the time I got upstairs I was dead beat.

Dear mother, she brought me my slippers and gave me a real good cup of tea, with brown bread and water-cress; and when we were half through, she looked at me earnestly, and asked, "Well, Barb, what will you do?"

"Ah, mother dear, I am sick of business; and, besides that, sixty pounds isn't half enough to begin on; only you needn't tell father so. I'll tell what I'd like."

"What's that, child?"

"I would like to go out as lady's maid. A lady's maid has

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a fine life of it. I have often gone with things to try on to grand houses, and you should see the comfort and elegance the lady's maids live in,—a beautiful parlour to dine and take tea in, lovely silk dresses to wear, the under-servants to wait on them and call them 'miss,' and only enough to do to keep you from going to sleep."

But mother didn't like the notion, and we argued the question best part of an hour.

At last she gave in. I *was* glad, for I should not have liked to go against her.

There is no use in going over all the ins and outs. After a great deal of talk, it was agreed that I should try service. I was not afraid of millinery or dressmaking, but my weak point was hair dressing. So I went and took lessons from a Frenchman recommended by madame. (Her real name was Bullock, which is excuse enough for changing it. What lady would confess to wearing costumes or hats from a Mrs. Bullock?) At all events, she had lived years in Paris, and had quite a French air.

I did not get on very well with the hair-dressing. I did not take to it, and so mistrusted myself, which just ensures failure. But I am writing quite too much. At last I put an advertisement in the *Times* (there were no penny papers then). It was wonderfully exciting to read about myself in print, but no one answered, so I put in another and another, till I seemed to have spent a fortune, and grew quite miserable, when one day madame sent for me, and I found she had kindly recommended me to a lady in the country, a relation of one of her customers. I went back to mother in high spirits.

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"Well, mother dear, I've got a chance at last!" I cried.
"Madame has found me a nice place."

"How do you know it's nice till you try it?" says mother.

"It sounds nice, anyway. I am to be young lady's maid in a grand family, to the niece of Lady Glengarvon, away in Northshire."

"A regular grandee," says mother.

"I suppose this young lady, her niece, is about my own age, and I would rather serve a young girl than a dowager. Madame says I shall have every comfort, but as it is my first place and there won't be much to do, I am to go for twenty pounds a year."

"Well," said mother, with a sniff, "the family may be grand, but the wages ain't. Do they promise a rise after a bit?"

"I didn't think of that," I answered, feeling a little ashamed.

Mother was not at all satisfied, but somehow a fancy for the country and something I can't describe seemed to make me quite eager to go; and, to make a long story short, about ten days after I started one morning early for Glengarvon Tower.

Poor mother! she was very sorry to part with me, but she was doting fond of Charley, my youngest brother, and he was office boy and always at home, but father surprised me. He came to the station and kissed me very kindly, and said, "Good-bye, Barb, and God bless you! You've been a good girl to us; remember that bit of money is yours whether I live or die!"

He made me feel quite funny and ready to cry, so I answered, "It's a lot for you to give, father."

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"I have had my opportunities," says he, "and I haven't neglected them."

"Still, if Joe or Charlie wants helping on a bit," I returned, "don't you hesitate to divide it with them."

Then I stepped into the carriage and soon left London far behind,—yes, and my old life too.

I did enjoy that journey. Flying along by country villages and over high embankments, from which you could see miles and miles of open country, through thick woods, that made me long to get out and ramble through them, rattling over bridges, flashing under them, thundering through tunnels, stopping at stations big and little. I never thought England was so large, for all the country I knew was Hampstead and Ealing. Then, of course, my mind was busy picturing the place I was going to and the people I was to meet.

Glengarvon Tower would be a splendid country-seat. I had often read of such in the *Family Herald* and "Reynolds's" paper. The housekeeper's room would be equal to an ordinary high-class drawing-room; and as to the upper servants, the thought of them made me quite nervous, though I told myself that, as a Londoner from a first-rate house like Madame Clothilde's, I was equal to the best of them. Anyway, my dressmaking would give every satisfaction. And if the young lady was pretty, I should enjoy setting her off. Then, of course, in a big country place I should have the best of fresh butter and cream, not to mention home-made bread, and strawberries, peaches, plums, apricots in their season; for I must confess I do like nice things to eat.

Altogether the journey did not seem long, though I was a little surprised at being told to take a third-class ticket. To

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be sure, that was the housekeeper's fault, for I didn't suppose that her ladyship wrote the letter of instructions.

It was past five, on a lovely summer's afternoon, when we reached Rockborough, the station I was told to stop at for Glengarvon Tower.

It is rather a big place, and there were a number of carts and vehicles of all sorts waiting for the London train ; but none of them looked like the sort of trap I expected to find waiting for me, and I felt a little bewildered when I had found my boxes and stood at the entrance of the station looking around me.

Presently an old iron-grey sort of man with a bent back and rusty-looking top-boots, a dark-blue, short frock-coat, with his plated buttons a good deal worn and showing the yellow metal underneath, came up and peered under my bonnet. "Be you the young 'ooman from Lunnon for Glengarvon?" he asked, in an odd, thick, gruff voice.

"Yes, I am."

"Coom along, then. Where's your baggage?"

"There," I said, pointing to it. "They are too heavy for you. I'll call the porter. Here, young man, give a hand with these trunks and I'll give you a sixpence!"

I never was shy, specially now when I knew I had two sovereigns and a good bit of silver in my pocket.

"An' that's saxpence easy airned," says the old groom, as he seemed.

With that he walked off very stiffly, and soon came back with an old-fashioned gig ever so high, all dusty, and splashed with dried mud, the paint rubbed off in places, and drawn by a tall, bony horse, with a rough coat that looked as if he had never been groomed since he was born.

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It wasn't easy to get in, for the step was bent crooked, and when I did sit down, I felt as if the first jolt would send me on to the horse's back.

They had a great to do tying on my luggage with pieces of rope, and seemed to think I had a rare quantity ; at last we started at a slow pace, the horse lumping down his feet as if each was a ton weight.

My driver kept quite silent, and I did not feel at all comfortable ; at last I asked if we had far to go.

"Six miles good, and every step uphill," he returned, and shut his month with a snap.

I will not try to describe the country, for I couldn't.

To me it seemed heavenly. The fresh-mown hay lay on the fields and scented the air, the young corn was beautifully green. Then as we went up and up we came to woods and open spaces, with rocks and patches of fern and brambles and wild flowers, with steep bits of road and wider views of the country below. It seemed very wild and lonely, and I felt half afraid of it. At last I saw before us a grey, gaunt-looking tower and biggish buildings about its base ; there the long hill ended : there was nothing higher.

Presently we came to a gate-way between two smaller towers like the big one.

A nice neat young woman came out to open it, and bid my driver good-day. Then he pointed before him with his whip, and said,—

"Yon's the Tower."

There was no park, nor fine trees about the place, only a stretch of grass land.

A good many cows were feeding about, and several had

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bells tied round their necks, which sounded very sweet. The avenue was not long ; just about the entrance there were some flower-beds and shrubs, neatly enough kept, also a few trees.

As we turned sharp round to a road leading to the stables we came upon two people who were talking earnestly together ; they stood on the grass near the gate of the stable-yard.

One a man in long gaiters and a short coat, the pockets of which seemed very full, the other a woman, a very tall person, in a black silk dress so tight that it made her look still taller. She wore a black satin bonnet set well forward ; it was old-fashioned with a high crown. At that time all bonnets had crowns, but this crown was specially large and distinct. There was a quilling of white net under the brim, and under that a broad, strong face with light keen eyes and a long upper lip. She had no scarf or cape to hide the figure, which had no more shape than a deal board, and her whole costume had a well-used look, as if it had been worn for years. She also wore a pair of wash-leather gauntlets, very grubby indeed, for she was holding out one hand with a commanding gesture and I could see it well.

My old charioteer touched his hat respectfully as we passed. I had found it hard to get an answer from him, but I could not resist my curiosity about this "decayed gentlewoman"-looking person. I hoped it was not the housekeeper, for she looked hard and severe, and one's comfort depends on the housekeeper.

"Who is that person in black?" I asked.

"That's her ladyship," he returned, with a broad grin.

I was astonished.

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"What ! Lady Glengarvon ?"

I could not keep back the exclamation.

"Ay, no less ; person or not, you'll soon find she's mistress here," said the old man. "But you be come as maid to our young lady, bain't you ?"

"I believe so."

By this time we had stopped at a door which led into the house. I was thankful to get down from the high seat, for the old gig tipped forward in a very uncomfortable way.

My driver rang a bell which hung outside the door, and a big, stout, red-faced girl in a funny short-checked cotton bodice tied round her waist (if one might call it a waist) by the strings of a big whitey-brown apron appeared.

She looked sunny and good-humoured enough. "Eh ! but you're late !" she said. "Coom alang wi' me, Mrs. Wylie has the tay waitin' ye."

I followed her down a long low passage to a comfortable room, oak-panelled, with a wide window looking out on a kitchen-garden. There was a table in the window, set with tea things, and a dish of cold salt beef, a plate of water-cress, and a loaf of brown bread.

A small elderly woman with a round white cap, so old-fashioned that Mr. Noah might have worn one like it in the ark. She had a black stuff gown and a print apron, and sat at another table busy covering a lot of jam-pots.

"Please, mum, here's the young 'ooman from Lunnon," said my conductress. She shut the door behind me as soon as I had crossed the threshold. At the same time the little woman at table stood up, wiped her hands, and came forward.

"I'm glad you've come, miss," she said, pleasantly enough.

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"You'll be tired and glad of a cup of tea. Won't you take off your bonnet and cape? It's warm to-day."

"It is indeed ; and the dust was terrible as we came along."

"I dare say it was. Sit down and take a bit of food."

I was glad to have some, and found the cold beef nice and tasty, but the bread was old, the cream I expected was very much skimmed milk, and as to fruit, there wasn't a sign of it ; still, the tea was very refreshing ; and the housekeeper, though rather silent and very quiet, had something, I can't exactly say what, that I liked.

As soon as I had eaten, Mrs. Wylie took me to my room. It was upstairs, and looked away over a wide stretch of moorland. All the furniture and a square of carpet seemed old and worn but very clean, and the brass ornaments on a chest of drawers highly polished.

"I have put you near Miss Morton's room," said the housekeeper. "It will be more convenient. There's another room between this and hers, you shall have it to work in. The poor young lady is looking forward to a couple of new dresses I can tell you."

That seemed very strange to me, and I followed her, wandering through a square room with a very low window into another much larger, furnished as a bedroom, with a huge carved bedstead of walnut wood and some faded tapestry on the walls.

"If you will sit down I will tell Miss Morton that you are here. She has been asking if you had come."

So saying she left me to look out at the same wild, lonely moor on which my own room looked, and wonder what sort of a place I had got into.

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I had not waited long when the door into the corridor opened and a young girl came into the room. It was a good hour for me when my eyes first looked upon her. She was very tall and slim and willowy-looking, with a clear, brunette complexion and a lot of real nut-brown hair. Oh, so rough and untidy! She looked graceful in spite of her dress,—a long skirt of stuff we used to wear then, called “linsey-woolsey,” and a frightfully ill-made jacket. She held a straw hat and a riding-whip in one hand, and as she came forward she looked at me with a pair of the most lustrous dark eyes, of no particular colour, I had ever seen. These were her great beauty. She smiled, too,—a sweet, sad sort of smile; her mouth was rather wide and curved down a little, which gave a pathetic expression to her dear face.

“And so you are my new maid,” she said in the softest voice, as if it came out of the depth of her thoughts.

“Yes, 'm, and I hope I shall give you satisfaction.”

“How old are you?” looking through me with her great speaking eyes.

“I am just turned twenty, 'm.”

“Not much more than two years my senior. I am so, *so* glad you are young! Am I very heartless not to like old people about me? I mean all old people. I do not mind even a good many, but not *quite* all. They seem to pity me because I am happy. They sigh and say, ‘Ah! well, I used to be like that when I was young. You will find things different as you go on.’”

“You should not mind them, 'm,” I said. “One may be happy in a different way, but I don't see why one should not be happy old as well as young.”

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"I am very, very glad you think so." She paused and seemed to think ; then, laying down her hat and whip, she seemed to brighten up. "And you will make me some nice dresses?"

"I will do my best."

"What is your name?"

"Barbara, or West, which you please."

"I shall call you Barbara. I do not like to call any girl by her surname."

"I have brought some fashion plates, 'm, and I can alter your things a little."

She shook her head. "I have nothing worth altering, Barbara. I must ask Lady Glengarvon's permission to buy some new stuffs. You made for Mrs. Quentin, did you not?"

"Yes, 'm. I have done a good deal of work for Mrs. Quentin."

"She was dreadfully shocked at my wardrobe. I believe it is in rather a pitiful state," and she laughed.

"Oh, that is small matter, 'm. I suppose you will be presented next year. Then you must have a lot of smart dresses."

"Presented!" she repeated. "Oh, I do not think I shall ever be presented, and I am not sure I wish to be," she sighed deeply. "You will find this place very dreary. Sometimes I feel sick of it, at others I feel as if I could not bear to leave it."

Then she opened her drawers and cupboard, and I must say I never saw such a beggarly account of trashy garments.

"You will have to see my Aunt Glengarvon to-morrow, so it is as well you should see the nakedness of the land. You can then tell her all I want. To-morrow you shall take a long walk with me. There is a sort of beauty in the bleak moor."

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And she waved her hand out the window, as she did so a group came round an angle of the house. A boy sat in a donkey-chair, attended by a quiet-looking, elderly man, like a gentleman's servant out of livery; he walked beside the chair, a young man led the donkey. The boy had a whole lapful of wild flowers; he strewed them right and left as he went along, laughing a sort of idiot laugh as he did so. I felt painfully impressed as the group crossed the lawn beneath the windows.

"Poor boy!" said Miss Morton, with a deep sigh. "I wish I had not a feeling of repulsion to him. It is weak and unkind; but I do, indeed, dread him, and when he is here he wants me to be with him always. There goes the future Lord Glengarvon."

I was surprised, and forgot myself into exclaiming, "I fancied, 'm, that *you* were the heir of the title and estates."

She shook her head. "I haven't any l'Estrange blood in my veins, Barbara."

After, I learned that the Baroness Glengarvon's mother married a second time (when her ladyship was about six years old) and had a girl, who married a Colonel Morton, and my young lady was her only child. She was little more than a baby when Mrs. Morton died. Then Lady Glengarvon, who was baroness in her own right, adopted her little niece and took her to live in the gloomy old Tower. But I did not know this for a long time.

The next morning I was called up before the baroness, a very severe, hard kind of woman; she cross-examined me as to what Miss Morton actually wanted.

I never met any one before so keenly alive to the value of money. She poohpoohed the idea of sending to London for

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materials; everything, she said, must be bought at Rockborough. She made out a list of all that was required and an estimate of every article. This she gave to me, with an instruction to keep below rather than to exceed it.

"But, my lady, if Miss Morton has any particular——"

"Nonsense!" she interrupted. "Miss Morton has no taste and no ideas. Do not take any heed of her."

Anyway, the third day after my arrival my young lady and I set out for Rockborough in a little carriage with a pair of shaggy ponies. It was a delightful drive and I enjoyed it. But before we had finished our shopping it came on to rain and blow, and we had a nasty drive back.

I have put down all this to please my dear young lady, as I always consider her, for this beginning of our curiously entwined lives is fresher in my memory than in hers.

CHAPTER II.

THE rain which spoiled Miss Morton's homeward drive was falling in London an hour or two earlier, and having made the streets sufficiently muddy to render them very formidable to delicate summer dresses, drifted away northward, when a gentleman who had been diligently reading the morning papers at the Travellers' Club walked leisurely into the hall, took his hat, stood at the door, scanning the weather for a minute or two, and, then descending the steps, made his way to Waterloo Place, and thence up Regent Street, and paused at the circus, where a very ragged misshapen figure, with an

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idiot-like face and a worn broom, had established himself in charge of the crossing.

He rapidly swept the mud right and left before this particular passenger, a man of middle height, squarely and powerfully built, and carrying himself with a great air of distinction yet by no means in soldierly fashion. He wore very long, dark moustaches, then considered rather distinctive of a military man.

His dress indicated a first-class tailor, and was very perfect in all its minutiae.

His hair and complexion were unusually dark for an Englishman, and a pair of deep-set grey eyes looked out with a half-amused, half-scornful gaze on the world.

The poor scarecrow who shambled before him touched his rough forelock as they reached the opposite side of the street and tried to speak ; but a sudden furious fit of coughing shook his frail form, till he clung to a lamp-post to keep himself from falling.

The pedestrian looked at him with keen observation, and murmured, "*He* is nearly off the hooks, poor devil !"

He stood still till the boy or man recovered his breath, and then asked, "Had that cough long?"

The scarecrow replied incoherently, for in addition to his cough his utterance was barely articulate. After more than one repetition, the enquirer made out that he had always coughed.

"Never tried a doctor, eh?" This query only drew forth a foolish laugh.

"A doctor might help you. There, there's sixpence. If you are here this time to-morrow, you shall have another."

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The sweeper gabbled something eagerly two or three times over, from which his interlocutor could only disentangle the word "sure." He nodded and went on till he reached the first block of houses in Portland Place, at one of which he paused and rang. The door was opened after a brief delay by a well-dressed, grave-looking man out of livery.

"Is the doctor here, Dodson?" in the tone of a master.

"No, sir."

"Ah, he was to have met me at two."

"Your letters are in the library, Mr. Vivian."

Vivian did not reply, but walked down the hall to a large, handsome, gloomy room on the same floor, lighted from above. This was comfortably furnished; a good many bowls of flowers stood about, and a wood-fire burned in the grate, though July was in its first day. Vivian drew a chair to the knee-hole table which stood at one side of the fireplace, and began to open and glance through several letters which lay on his blotting-book. His countenance grew very set and hard as he read. It was a strong, resolute face, the brow frowning when in thought, the lips smiling pleasantly when he spoke. Then he drew other letters from his pocket and re-read them, slowly tearing up others and consigning them to the waste-paper basket, his eyes the while gazing far away.

At length the door opened and the same servant announced "Doctor Chaldecott."

"Behind time, my dear doctor," cried Vivian, rising and coming to meet him with frank cordiality. "What's the matter? You look rather down on your luck."

"Well, I am, but I need not trouble you on that score."

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"Presently you will. Just now I am in tolerably deep waters myself."

He returned to his seat as he spoke, and Doctor Chaldecott drew a chair opposite his friend and patron. He was about the same age, between thirty and forty,—a fair, kindly, soft-looking man, with intelligent, sharp, light grey eyes, which looked sad and sombre enough on the present occasion. Slight, tall, and quiet in aspect, he looked a gentleman, though somewhat overshadowed by the extreme distinction of his companion.

"When do you go to Glengarvon?" asked Vivian. "Tomorrow?"

"If you wish it, of course. But if you could give me a day or two longer I'd be very grateful."

"The baroness writes me a long letter—for her—about that wretched boy. She says he seems in a bad way. Moreover, she is dissatisfied with his valet. She and Constance have taken it into their wise heads that Tom is afraid of Marks, so she is anxious you should go down to him. Lady Glengarvon's wishes are not to be lightly treated, and though she shrinks from her unfortunate heir and would as lief touch a toad, she has very strict ideas as to her duty to our joint ward. Curious, clever old woman! It is lucky for me I am a favorite with her. Why do you want to stay, Chaldecott? I don't think you have a wide or very attractive circle of acquaintance in town."

"I haven't. There you are right. Still, London has one all-powerful magnet."

"Isn't the magnetism exhausted yet? Why don't you set up a counter-irritant or magnet? Why don't you amuse your-

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self at the Tower by making love to Constance Morton? It would not be a bad cure for you and good training for her."

The doctor looked at him and laughed.

"The last proposition I should expect from you. I thought the baroness meant her to be your bride."

"She does, and enforces her wishes by promising a good dowry. I shall have to take it if—if—— But that is another story. To return to yours. What has gone wrong with you? You are a mad man to think of marrying. But there is no use in speaking sense to a lunatic. I thought things promised fairly."

"You see I hoped old Sandford would give his daughter a trifle to start with, but the wife's interest is too strong. I know Jessie is utterly miserable with her step-mother, and now I am too poor to rescue her from her slavery."

"What would it take to start you? two hundred? It isn't much, but I couldn't give it to you unless——"

"Those infernal old lawyers are such screws with poor Tom's money. I only wonder they do not make me pay rent for this barn, and I want money deucedly myself. I am losing my life waiting for that poor idiot's shoes. I shall be an old man before I can make an upward step; I had better marry the baroness's niece and establish myself at the Tower. But heavens! what a bread-and-butter miss she is! I fancy she doesn't like me, but I'll settle all that when I have time."

"I think there is more in Miss Morton than you imagine. I fancy, too, she will turn out a handsome woman."

"That is second-sight with a vengeance! Why, she is absolutely colorless, and that miserly old woman, her aunt, has neglected her shamefully! Why, I was obliged to start my

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sister, Mrs. Quentin, on her to get Constance a decent outfit ! Come, make up your mind. Leave your London entanglements behind and do a little vicarious love-making on my account. Tell Constance what a fine fellow I am, cram her with stories of my fastidious taste and success, or—— Dine with me to-night *tête-à-tête*, and I'll tell you *how* you may do yourself *and* me a service. Are you free ? Are you game for a long story ?”

“ As long as it is only to listen——”

“ You must act, man ! or you'll be of no use,” cried Vivian, ringing the bell. “ Doctor Chaldecott will dine with me to-day,” he said, when his servant appeared. “ See that we have a good dinner and plenty of champagne.”

* * * * *

When the two men met again, Vivian, whose moods were variable, made himself particularly agreeable, indulging Chaldecott in much talk respecting his love-troubles,—a very unusual treat, for Vivian's mood was generally rather blasphemous as regarded love and sentiment.

The “ convives” were very intimate in spite of the difference between them in social position. Dinner over and their attendant withdrawn, Vivian pushed the claret to his guest, saying, “ It's my turn now, Chaldecott. I have a tale to unfold which will not harrow up your soul. I hope—you are too sensible a fellow to be easily started—to keep your brains clear and ready to help my slower invention.”

While Vivian proceeded to expound certain ideas which had lately taken possession of him, the reader shall be made acquainted with the personages of this “ ower true tale” and the relationship between them.

Elizabeth l'Estrange, Baroness Glengarvon, succeeded her

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brother, who was slightly her junior, some twenty-three years before the opening of this story.

She found the estate heavily encumbered, a condition of things begun in her father's time and successfully completed by her predecessor. She was a woman of strong will, a clear head, practical sense; one streak of idealism dominated her nature. She knew she was plain and unattractive, and the notion of such marriages as were proposed to her (chiefly from newly-made millionaires who were pleased with the notion of their heirs bearing an old Norman title) were utterly repulsive, she therefore devoted herself to the somewhat hopeless task of clearing the estates, with a devotion and tireless effort, a miserly self-denial, and absolute disregard of everything outside the salvation of the Glengarvon estates that compelled success.

The long and arduous struggle moulded her character on rigid lines, and when the result of struggle brought prosperity with an ever-increasing tide, she had become incapable of relaxing in her severe economics,—not a chair or table, not a new carpet, curtain, or rug, had been added to the plenishing of the rambling old house since the Baroness Elizabeth bore rule in her ancestral home. The care with which everything had been mended and preserved was remarkable; in short, the Tower management might have taught economy to the humblest cottage.

The mother of Lady Glengarvon was young when left a widow, and before long she married again. In due time she gave her eldest daughter a brother and sister; they were brought up together, and a warm affection sprang up between the half-sisters; the younger of whom married early a well-

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born but impecunious Captain Morton, whom she accompanied to India, where both were cut off by cholera, leaving their baby girl to the guardianship and charity of her aunt, who, if not loving, was never unkind, and provided her niece with a bare sufficiency of life's necessities.

The late baron had died unmarried, and after the present peeress the next heir was a certain George Vivian, first cousin on his mother's side to Lady Glengarvon. He was a quiet, inoffensive man, who allowed himself to be married to a wealthy woman, only child of a manufacturer. His gentle, kindly manners made his wife very happy; and when, after ten years of placid life, she passed away, leaving no child, she bequeathed all she possessed to her beloved husband.

He did not survive her long; but long enough to marry a pretty, delicate, high-born girl, by whose side, when driving together, he was, owing to some half-suspected heart-trouble, suddenly struck down. Some three or four months later Mrs. Vivian gave birth to a puny infant, to whom she clung with passionate fondness, though time only served to show that he was as imperfect in mind as in body.

When the poor boy was about ten years old, Rex, younger brother of the late George Vivian, returned from wandering to and fro, and installed himself as chief friend and adviser to the sickly young widow, to whom he soon made himself indispensable. This rather surprised the Vivian family, for in his early manhood Rex had not earned the sort of character that would exactly fit him to be the guide, philosopher, and friend of an extremely fastidious, slightly hysterical, and deeply religious young woman, who was in a perpetual state of mourning.

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After working hard and impressing his associates with the idea of a man determined to make a brilliant success at the bar, he suddenly became quite as eager about horse-racing and yachting, society, music, and was one of the best-known men about town. People were beginning to wonder how far he would manage to stretch his younger son's portion, which could not have been much originally; for his father, Lord Fitzroy Vivian, had not been rich when he disappeared to make a tour of the world. This occupied a considerable time, his absence being prolonged by a severe illness which attacked him when visiting a native potentate in India. His life was saved by the unremitting attention and skill of a young English doctor in the service of the rajah, Vivian's host.

Some two or three years before the opening of this story Doctor Chaldecott appeared in London. He was cordially welcomed by his ex-patient, who soon succeeded in convincing Mrs. Vivian that no medico was so likely to develop her boy's mental and physical powers and to treat herself so successfully as Dr. Philip Chaldecott. For a while the young widow seemed considerably better and more cheerful, when suddenly, in the midst of her improvement, she died. The poor imbecile orphan, by his father's will, was the ward of his uncle, Rex Vivian, and his cousin, Lady Glengarvon. The boy soon evinced a strong liking for his uncle.

Rex Vivian was a general favorite. He was bright and energetic, with a sort of rough cordiality as far as possible removed from commonness, a perfect assurance which was in no way overbearing, and an air of all-round capability which impressed all who met him. He was open-handed, too, and

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a lover of pleasure, which to him meant strong excitement. In this and all other likings he indulged himself to the utmost limit of his means,—many said beyond it,—but of his real life none knew much. Such was the position of our characters some time before the Indian mutiny convulsed England with dismay and fury.

The "friends in council" had dined well and with discrimination, Vivian enjoying abundantly the dry champagne with which he qualified the repast. He talked well and with animation on general topics, but as soon as the servants had served coffee and retired Vivian rose.

"Come to the fire, Chaldecott," he said. "Though it is July, it is damp and chilly. Light up, and let us discuss future plans."

He handed the doctor his cigar-case as he spoke, and Chaldecott was struck with the sudden and complete change in his tone and expression. His deep and rather harsh voice was grave to seriousness, his marked brows slightly knit as if in earnest thought.

"Thank you. I am at your service." And the doctor took an easy-chair at the opposite side of the fire. After a minute of silence Vivian began to speak in a low voice, but very distinctly and deliberately. The sitting lasted well into the night, and before it broke up Chaldecott knew more of his friend's character, ambition, daring, than he had ever known before, although they had always (after Vivian's illness) discussed and argued all possible matters with the most outspoken candour.

"Half-past twelve!" cried the doctor at last. "I shall get away to bed! I feel to want sleep, in order to begin our

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work to-morrow. You will go down to Glengarvon next week, while I keep watch here?"

"Yes; and keep me well informed. I shall run up to town whenever it is necessary."

"How long shall you stay?"

"That depends on *you* and your report. Meantime I shall try to make the acquaintance of my future wife, for I shall marry her as soon as can be managed. Her money will be most acceptable, and the baroness will give me a slice of it at once. I am pretty well at the length of my tether. I don't fancy the young lady likes me, but I'll change all that."

"Perhaps. She has a good deal of character. I found her rather charming."

"My dear fellow, you have an unlimited fund of sentimentality where women are concerned. If you had not carried an antidote with you in the shape of your passion for Miss Sanford,—and you are one of those epicures who only care for one woman at a time,—why——"

"That is not a matter of choice. Well, good-night. I'll be with you about two to-morrow; and, Vivian, do not dare too boldly."

"Oh, if you dare at all, be greatly daring. I do not for a moment fear failure."

"The risk is great."

"The gain will be greater, especially to you, Chaldecott."

"Good-night."

They shook hands cordially and parted.

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CHAPTER III.

NOTHING could be a stronger contrast than the romance in which Barbara had indulged respecting the grand place to which she was going and the reality she found.

In spite of her dominant practical common sense there was a streak of romance in her nature of which she herself had no suspicion. This it was which reconciled the shrewd young woman to the remoteness, the silence, the indifferent pay, the exceedingly plain food, and the total absence of excitement at Glengarvon.

Something in her young lady's personality attracted her powerfully. She was so unlike any of the people Barbara had met before.

Constance Morton's charm consisted largely of contradictions. She could be wildly gay, and then sudden fits of depression would send her down to the lowest depths of silence and abstraction. Sometimes she was abrupt and indifferent, but oftener she was gentle, sweet, infinitely considerate, looking into your face with her great lustrous eyes, that seemed to divine all the sorrows of your heart and long to soothe them.

Then through all the disguise of her sordid garments, her untrained movements, her instinctive natural elegance made itself felt, and filled the soul of Barbara, which as regarded clothes was certainly artistic, with visions of what she might become if clothed by a competent and experienced *modiste*.

Soon Barbara found herself made more and more a companion to her young mistress, and gathered from her intermit-

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tent talk of the past some idea of her life and the influences under which she had grown up.

With the noble *châtalaine* Barbara was much less at home. Indeed, the baroness was rather formidable to her household. Though stout of heart, Barbara was by no means easy in her mind, when Mrs. Wylie brought her a message on the second morning after her shopping expedition with Constance, commanding the lady's maid's attendance in her ladyship's study.

This was a sombre apartment on the first floor, where the book-shelves were loaded with solid-looking volumes on farming, gardening, farriery, works on building, irrigation, and the laws between landlord and tenant, also digests of sundry acts for the use of county magistrates. Nothing lighter than a voluminous cookery book was to be found in this collection. For a wonder many new books and editions of useful works of reference were among the private library of Glengarvon.

Here, at a huge knee-hole table, the baroness usually spent her mornings, adding up accounts, checking bills, writing letters in a curt, masculine style, and making endless entries in a heavy ledger.

She was deep in some such occupation, seated at her table, on which lay several open letters, and was crowned by her well-known black satin bonnet, which was recognized by every man, woman, and child for miles round as the outward and visible sign of Elizabeth, Baroness Glengarvon. It was an aggressive bonnet, with a steep crown and what was called a "curtain" across the back; this always looked as if it had been dropped from regions above on the very top of her head and stuck there immovably. This head-piece she assumed

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immediately after breakfast, in preparation for her inspection of dairy and the poultry-yard, etc., and until her abundant grey locks were dressed for dinner there it remained ready for any out-door emergency.

"I have not been able to see you before, to get an account of your purchases for Miss Morton," began the baroness, who, though hard indeed, almost masculine in looks, had a soft, refined voice, which resembled her niece's.

"I have brought the bills, my lady."

"That is right. What is your name?"

"West, my lady,—Barbara West."

"Well, give me the bills. Hum, what's this? Sixteen yards grey alpaca lustre, one pound eight! That is an enormous sum. I never heard of this stuff before. I thought I explained to you that I could not permit any extravagance. These new-fashioned commodities are always costly. One pound eight!" she repeated, in a meditative, regretful tone.

"Pardon me. I can assure your ladyship that alpaca is quite an inexpensive material. I hesitated lest you should consider it *too* common for a young lady like Miss Morton, my lady."

"Inexpensive simplicity and quiet distinction are all that is necessary for a young girl."

"There is very little style about alpaca, my lady. Of course, it may pass in the country. In London it would be quite impossible."

"Now, this fine long cloth and embroidery. I see they cost fifteen shillings and ninepence. This really is extravagance," and so on, to Barbara's infinite surprise. "You

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should not have yielded to Miss Morton's thoughtless extravagance."

"But, madam,—I mean my lady,—Miss Morton did not suggest anything. I never saw a young lady so indifferent to her clothes."

"This is your first place as lady's maid?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Then how do you know what girls like Miss Morton are or are not?"

"I have made for a good many, my lady."

"Well, at all events I shall have to pay these bills. Now, I want you to have these dresses ready by next week."

"I shall do my best; but I can hardly finish two dresses in a week, single-handed."

"How's that? I thought you undertook to make dresses?"

"Yes, my lady; but one pair of hands could not do two dresses in the time. If you would give me some assist——"

"Assistance!" cried Lady Glengarvon, snapping her short. "I can allow none! That is always the way; one new expense leads to others. Do the best you can. Probably Miss Morton can assist you herself; she used to do needle-work with her governess. I want her to have a new dress to wear on Tuesday next; manage it between you."

The baroness gathered up her bills, gave Barbara a little nod of dismissal, and took up her pen.

Barbara gladly retreated. Lady Glengarvon never raised her voice, never was angry, never was hasty in word or deed, but having decided on any question was perfectly immovable; opposition to her will was absolutely useless, as every one

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about her well knew, yet she was not disliked, for she was rarely unjust.

"Well?" exclaimed Constance Morton, when her maid returned to the room which served that young lady as bed-chamber and boudoir.

"I have given her ladyship the bills and——"

"Is she awfully angry?" asked Constance, in an anxious tone.

"She was not too well pleased, miss; and I am disappointed, for I never took such pains to buy cheap before."

"My aunt is a little difficult, and—and pray remember I live on her bounty. It is real charity, for she does not care for me in the least, though she is never unkind."

"Law, miss! I wonder how that can be and she all alone but for you. Another lady would be ready to eat you."

"I don't think people care for me, and I care for very few." She sighed, and a sad, far-away look crept into her soft, dreamy eyes.

"Her ladyship wants me to make both your dresses by next week, but I told her that was quite impossible unless she allowed some assistance; so at last she said I *must* have one ready on Tuesday next."

"Tuesday? Why Tuesday?" exclaimed Constance, and the colour rose slowly in her cheeks, while a grave, displeased expression gleamed in her eyes.

"Well, she just said so," returned Barbara; "and—I don't quite like to tell you, miss, but her ladyship said that *you* might help."

"Why don't you like to tell me?" asked Constance, slowly. "I should like to work with you. It is something to do, and

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I am so tired of not caring for anything. You can tell me about London as we sew. I long to see London."

"Have you never been in London, miss?" cried Barbara, in a tone of infinite compassion.

"Only when I was a poor little baby, so I cannot remember it."

"And have you lived all your seventeen or eighteen years here, miss? You'll pardon the freedom."

"Oh, yes ; certainly," said Constance, with the wonderfully bright, sweet smile which Barbara found so attractive.

"Yes ; I never left Glengarvon except once, when Mrs. Quentin asked me to stay with her after I had had measles. Then I was rather miserable, because some children who were there looked so beautifully dressed and I was so shabby. I suppose that was rather contemptible."

"It was only natural."

Here Barbara approached the large projecting window which looked out from the western end of the house.

"What a beautiful view !" she said. "It is quite like a picture."

The mansion at this side was built on the edge of a steep, almost precipitous declivity, which, being turned away from the sea (which was visible from other parts of the house), was covered with a thick growth of trees. Beneath was a wide, variegated plain bounded by distant blue hills.

Half-way down the descent, some blue smoke curled upwards from among the trees, but the dwelling from which it arose was not visible.

"I did not think any one lived so near the Tower," continued Barbara, pointing to the smoke.

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"No? That is Mr. Musgrave's place,—Ravenscroft. He is one of my aunt's chief tenants. He and his forefathers have held that land for a hundred and fifty years. The only play and pleasure I have ever had has been with the Musgrave children. There are two girls, one older and one younger than myself, and two boys, both older." She stopped abruptly, and Barbara thought her eyes looked moist.

"That was nice for you, miss. It is bad not to have young companions."

"I don't know whether it was good or bad," returned Constance. She said it wearily, and stood gazing through the window, not seeing what was before her for a minute or two, Barbara keeping respectfully silent, when Mrs. Wylie, the housekeeper, came in.

"If you please, Miss Constance, her ladyship says will you go out with Master Vivian? He is rather in a tantrum. His man Marks wanted to make him go out at once. But he is crying for you; he doesn't like Marks. So will you walk with him?"

"Poor boy! Yes, I will come directly; but it will be very warm. We must go into the woods." The housekeeper left the room, and Barbara went to fetch her mistress her large shady hat and a light cape.

"I do hate going out with Tom Vivian," she exclaimed; "and he always wants me. I am selfish and unkind. He has so few pleasures, but it pains me to see him; sometimes, too, he is so furious and spiteful. Put on your bonnet and come with me, Barbara. I do not care to be alone with Tom and Marks."

"Yes, 'm. I did intend to cut your skirt this morning——"

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"Oh, never mind ; I will help you this afternoon."

In the hall they found the heir of Glengarvon in the invalid-chair which was used to carry him up and down stairs, for the unfortunate boy had very little use of his limbs. The floor was strewn with his gloves, a picture-book he often took out with him, and other small articles. He had screamed viciously at every attempt to take him to his donkey-chair, and, though his utterance was very imperfect, he always contrived to articulate two names very clearly ; they were "Rex" and "Con."

As soon as he caught sight of Constance he laughed with a little more human expression than he usually showed, and repeated some queer sounds which his attendant seemed to understand, for he immediately picked up the gloves and gave them to the poor boy, who strove to put them on, and then held out his hands to Constance. Barbara thought she had never seen such a pitiable sight, and felt that it was but natural that her young lady should shrink from so repulsive an object.

But Constance smiled kindly on him and put on his gloves gently. Then he was carried down and put into his little donkey-carriage, and the procession started. They crossed the front of the house and passed through a gate which opened into the wood visible from the window of Miss Morton's bedroom. The path or road zigzagged down the steep descent in gentle gradients into the cool, shady depths of the wood. Occasionally the object of their care uttered uncouth and partially articulate sounds, always calling "Con" if she were a moment out of his sight.

At last they reached a flat space of greensward, where they halted.

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The donkey was allowed to crop the grass, a sort of couch was arranged with the cushions of his carriage for the invalid, for whom Constance gathered ferns, leaves, and flowers, weaving them, with Barbara's help, into fantastic ornaments for the donkey's head and the little phaeton. This pleased the boy vastly for a while. He laughed with idiot glee till he suddenly changed, and in his imperfect language (which, rather to Barbara's surprise, her mistress seemed to understand) he commanded them to desist. Next Constance tried the picture-book, describing each page in slowly uttered simple words till, struck by his perfect quiet, she looked up and saw that he was asleep.

The two attendants had withdrawn to a little distance ; the lad whose duty it was to lead the donkey was lying face down on the grass ; the valet, his back against the stem of a tree, was reading a London paper ; everything was still. Constance closed the book and, rising from her seat on one of the logs of wood which lay about, walked over to sit beside Barbara, who had placed herself not quite so near to the object of their care.

"I am always so glad to see him asleep," said Constance. "He looks quite nice, quite human, when he is asleep."

"There is certainly a great difference in him," returned Barbara, rising to look at the sleeper. "It is sad——"

A deep-throated bark interrupted her, and a large mastiff, a formidable animal, bounded from the underwood, and to Barbara's terror sprang upon Constance, almost overturning her in his eager onset ; but Barbara soon perceived that his object was to caress not to attack. He whined with pleasure and licked her hands, sitting down before her and laying his

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great paw on her knee. Nor was Constance less demonstrative; she threw her arms round his neck and hugged him to her. "Cedric, dear, dear old Cedric, at least you love me still!" she cried. "Is he not a beauty, Barbara? He is Alan Musgrave's dog, and such an intelligent dear! Did you notice a path to the left higher up just before that last turn?"

"Yes, 'm."

"That is the path to Ravenscroft; but," with a sigh, "I never go there now."

"Indeed, miss?"

"No. You see, Louisa, the eldest girl, married last April and went away to Devonshire, and Mary, my great friend, was sent to school at Bath, and Mrs. Musgrave does not care to see me now."

"Well, miss, now you are growing up, they cannot expect to have you with them as you were when a child. Her ladyship would not like it."

"I do not think her ladyship would ever have liked it," said Constance, with a far-away look. "She did not know much about it. My governess was rather old and easily tired. She hated walking, so she was quite pleased to let me play and walk about with Lou and Mary Musgrave; they were very good, and *much* nicer than I am. Mrs. Musgrave is sweet, too, and so pretty still."

"But then, Miss Morton, she is only a farmer's wife."

"Ah, Barbara! I wish she were my mother! How sweet it must be to have a mother!" She spoke dreamily, stroking the dog's great ears the while.

"It is indeed. I have every right to say so," responded Barbara, heartily.

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"Then you are very happy." Constance kept silence after these words for a few minutes, and Barbara did not venture to speak unless spoken to. Then her young mistress resumed.

"Wylie told me that Rex Vivian is coming down on Tuesday. I wish it were Dr. Chaldecott. *He* was to have come. He is so nice and kind and talks delightfully. He is very clever, but he seems quite ready to talk to me and listen to the little I have to say, though he has seen so much, for he seems to have seen every part of the world. He is so different from Mr. Vivian."

"Indeed, 'm," ejaculated Barbara, who had pricked up her ears. She had, indeed, been on the lookout for Miss Morton's possible "young man," and was disposed to cry "Eureka!" at these words. Barbara had been a universal confidante to the young ladies at Madame Clothilde's, and thought "a young man" was the appanage of all tolerably good-looking girls.

She was quite alive to the fact she was herself rather short and square; that her face was broad, her eyes small, though shrewd and intelligent; her hair light and colourless; that she was only saved from ugliness by the expression of kindness and intelligence in her honest countenance, and that the silliest and dullest of her companions, provided she had a pretty face and a smart figure, had a considerably better chance of a sweetheart than herself. But Miss Morton, though not exactly pretty, was something more. Barbara's wide experience in suiting clothes to the wearers suggested endless possibilities in her young lady's face and figure.

But Miss Morton was speaking again. "You know—or, rather, I must tell you—Rex Vivian is that poor boy's guar-

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dian. He is my aunt's first cousin. He comes here often in the summer, and sometimes in the winter to hunt. I do not like him. He makes me feel so insignificant, and he is overbearing. He gives me an idea of Brian de Bois Guilbert, only Brian was in earnest about things, and Rex always seems in gay good humour,—the sort of gaiety that laughs *at* every one not with them. He annoys me; and my aunt thinks him so wise and clever. Now, Dr. Chaldecott speaks to me as if I were a reasonable creature. He has even let me know he is engaged to such a nice girl! I can see he loves to talk about her. They are too poor to marry just yet, but he is trying to buy what he calls a practice. If I had some money I would lend or give it to him."

"It does not do to give too readily, Miss Constance," rejoined Barbara. "No doubt a clever gentleman, especially with friends like her ladyship and this Mr. Vivian, will soon get a practice."

"I don't fancy Mr. Vivian would help any one if it gave him trouble, only he is really kind and good to his nephew. I am quite sure he is, for Tom is so fond of him; he will take his hand and mumble it, and I am sure Rex Vivian hates him to do so, as I should. He is quite patient though, better than I should be; but I try to be kind, especially now, for I am sure Marks frightens him. If Dr. Chaldecott were here I would tell him. He is the only person who thinks what I say worth listening to. By the way, if I speak out what I think to you, you must never repeat what I say."

"I think you will find me silent and faithful," returned Barbara, quietly.

While they were exchanging these sentences the great

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mastiff had risen with great deliberation and stalked across to where the crippled boy lay, proceeding to sniff at and examine his prostrate form. Suddenly the boy opened his eyes, and, seeing the formidable animal standing over him, screamed out with wild, piercing, discordant shrieks.

His valet started up and rushed to drive off the dog.

"Don't touch him ! don't strike him !" cried Constance, eagerly. "He will kill you if you do ! Leave him to me." She was at Tom's side as she spoke, interposing herself between him and the dog, which had no evil intentions whatever, and sat down quite quietly when Constance patted him.

"My poor boy ! my dear Tom ! You are safe. He shall do you no harm." She knelt beside him and clasped her arms round him. He clung to her and hid his face on her shoulder, while the cause of the rumpus sat and looked on with an air of profound observation.

It was long before the invalid could be soothed into anything like composure or induced to let Constance stir from his side ; he sobbed and trembled in a pitiable state of terror, and no one liked to meddle with the offending mastiff, until Barbara took her mistress's place beside the boy, who always preferred women to men, and calling Cedric, Constance went back with him to where the path to the farm-house branched off. Here, in obedience to her command, the dog returned home.

Then Tom Vivian was settled in his donkey-chair and they proceeded home, Marks declaring that Mr. Musgrave must be warned to keep that dangerous beast on the chain.

"It was very unfortunate that Master Vivian should have

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been frightened, but the dog meant no harm. He is a good-natured animal except when interfered with," said Constance. "But my aunt will be very vexed, she fancied Tom was so much better."

In effect, when nearing the entrance Lady Glengarvon met the party, and the imbecile, all eagerness to tell his dreadful experience, almost screamed unintelligible gabble as soon as he approached his kinswoman.

"What is the matter with him? What has happened?" asked the baroness, her brows contracting in an ominous way.

Constance replied by relating the incident which had so terrified the unfortunate heir of Glengarvon.

"I am exceedingly annoyed," she said. "It was most inconsiderate of you, Constance, to encourage that great brute. You know how essential quiet and repose are to that poor child. He spoke with comparative distinctness this morning, and now he only gibbers. He must have a composing draught and lie down for a couple of hours. Let me know when he wakes, if you can get him to sleep. You had better go and sit by him; sing or do something to soothe him, and if possible repair the mischief you have done."

Constance raised her eyes to her aunt's and gave her a lingering reproachful glance, her lips parted as if to speak, but she closed them again and kept silence.

Barbara followed her young mistress to her room.

"I shall take a book with me," said Constance, "for Tom will probably sleep, but if I move from him, he is sure to wake up and cry out."

"It is rather hard on you, miss."

"Oh, no; I am glad to do him any good."

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"I will cut out your corsage then, miss, and tack it together, ready for trying on. I shall be ready to begin work really to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was something amusing yet pathetic to Barbara in the pleasure and excitement with which Constance began the novel task of making her own dress. She asked endless questions as to the cutting and fitting, and plied her needle diligently but slowly, with evidently unaccustomed fingers.

The second day, however, she was less absorbed in her work; she let the breadths she was joining drop occasionally, her eyes gazing far away in apparent forgetfulness of her present surroundings.

"I fear I have been very idle and careless all my life," she exclaimed, rousing herself after one of these pauses, with an apologetic smile which seemed infinitely sweet to her sympathetic attendant.

"I never cared to learn anything useful. I only loved to wander about the woods and moors, and dream and enjoy being alive. Now it is very hard for me to sit still and work, but anything is better than thinking and remembering."

"You can have very little to remember, miss, that would trouble you."

"You think so? It seems to me that I have done nothing all my eighteen years but make mistakes."

"What else can young creatures do?" returned the lady's maid, with a pleasant, kindly smile. "If you never make any more, you will be a wonderful lady."

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"You seem very happy, Barbara," exclaimed her mistress, looking wistfully at her.

"Yes, miss ; I have never had much trouble."

"Nor behaved badly to any one?"

"Well, not that I know of," said Barbara, after a brief pause to review her life. "Of course, I have met girls among the other apprentices who were nasty enough, and I think I was even with them. Anyway, I tried——"

An amused look and a slow smile crept over Miss Morton's face. Barbara coloured up. "I hope I am not making too free," she said. "But you see it is my first place, miss, and I know my manners are not exactly——"

"I do not see anything to find fault with," interrupted Constance, gently ; "and I like to talk with you, or I should, if I were quite sure you would never repeat anything I said."

"I think you may be sure of that, miss ; one learns to keep your mouth shut in a big establishment like Madame Clothilde's. No one ever accused me of making mischief."

Constance made no reply ; she resumed her work, and presently asked how soon Barbara thought the dress would be finished.

"On Tuesday afternoon, if I can sit close at it."

"You will be very tired, will you not?"

"Oh, dear, no, miss ; it is my business."

Here Constance let her work slip to the ground and moved slowly across the room, seating herself in the window, her elbow on the broad high ledge, her head upon her hands, gazing out through the open casement. Barbara worked on, looking at the graceful, pensive figure from time to time,

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wondering what reminiscences her young mistress's monotonous life could have afforded.

Suddenly Constance started, half rose to her feet, and leant far out of the window. The character of her pose was suddenly changed to alert watchfulness, but her face was turned away from the observant Barbara.

The next moment she rose up, stood quite still for a second or two, and then said, cheerfully, "Put down your work, Barbara; it is too beautiful a morning to stay in-doors. You will work twice as well when you come back. Then, poor Tom is not to leave the grounds to-day, so you and I can go across the moor, it is so sweet and fresh there. Come, Barbara, put down your work."

"Well, Miss Constance, if your dress is not finished in time it will not be my fault."

"No, no! It will be mine. Bring me my hat, and get your own."

It was a lovely morning. Heavy showers during the night had cooled the air, and a few fleecy clouds broke the monotony of the blue.

The Glengarvon moors stretched for some miles north and west, and at one point commanded a wide view over the lower country and even a glimpse of the sea.

This portion of the moor was distinguished by a large cairn on the scene of a bygone tragedy. It was now overgrown with coarse grass, brambles, heather, and gorse.

Towards this coign of vantage Constance directed her steps, sometimes talking quickly, sometimes falling into prolonged silence, but whether speaking or not evidently pre-occupied.

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Barbara was enchanted with the fresh invigorating air, which quickened the healthy blood in her veins and made the mere sense of existence delicious.

"I thought the woods more delightful than any place I had ever seen, miss," exclaimed Barbara, too exhilarated to hold her tongue till her mistress broke silence. "But this wild, open place seems best of all."

"I love it, too," returned Constance. "It gives me a feeling of life and strength."

"There is the big dog that frightened poor Master Vivian. I suppose he is not really fierce? Is he, miss?"

"What, Cedric? Where—where is he?" cried Constance, eagerly grasping her companion's wrist in an unconscious way. But the question was settled by the great mastiff, who perceived them, and came swiftly, with great bounds, over the heather to greet his friend, and fawned on Constance in a somewhat overpowering fashion.

"Dear old doggie!" she said affectionately, slipping her fingers under his collar and letting him lead her towards the cairn. As they approached it, Barbara saw a man, who had been lying on the heather, spring to his feet and stand as if awaiting their approach. He was tall and slight, but something in his pose suggested firmness and self-confidence, if not physical strength. There was a certain hauteur in the setting on of his head, which was well clothed with thick curly fair hair tinged with red gold. He wore long moustaches, a shade darker, and looked steadily at the two women as they approached out of a pair of stern, keen, blue-grey eyes. He wore a dark brown velveteen shooting-jacket, like a game-keeper's, and gaiters buttoned to the knee. Altogether he

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struck Barbara as a very good-looking young fellow, and she began to wonder where he came from.

While she conjectured, Constance had flushed up to the roots of her hair, and then grown pale as the white roses at her waist. She stopped within a few feet of the stranger, and stretching out her hand, said simply, "Alan!" He came forward quickly, and held it for a moment, looking into her face with a wistful, searching gaze, as if he would read her heart.

"I hardly hoped to see you!" he exclaimed, in a deep almost harsh voice. "And who—who is your friend?" glancing at Barbara.

"Oh, I have risen in my aunt's estimation since I saw you," said Constance, with a sweet joyous laugh, a shimmering light in her eyes as though the sunshine in her heart shone through the veil of flesh.

"I am honoured with a lady's maid, called Barbara, all to myself." She waved her hand towards that young person. "I hope she will be more fortunate than that former Barbara, who, according to the legend, died singing a ballad."

"It's not likely *I'll* do that, miss," said Barbara, good-humouredly.

"No. You look a deuced deal too sensible for such an end!" cried Alan, smiling, and thereby showing an array of strong white teeth.

"Where are you going, Con—I mean Miss Morton?"

"Oh, anywhere, nowhere."

"May I come with you to the farm?"

"Part of the way," said Constance, hesitating. "I dare not stay out too long. Tom Vivian is with us now, and

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I suppose I must go out in the grounds with him after luncheon."

"It is awfully hard on you to be troubled with that wretched idiot. How long does he stay?"

"I am not sure. Rex Vivian is coming on Tuesday, and may take him away, for he has been ill. Cedric nearly frightened him into fits." And she recounted the dog's delinquency.

"I hope he will live on," said Alan.

"Well, yes; but why do you especially wish it?"

"Because he will keep Vivian out of Glengarvon. I don't think my father would like him for a landlord."

They walked on in silence, Barbara dropping behind with Cedric, who made some grave advances to acquaintance with her, then Alan resumed: "Vivian is very intimate with my captain, and comes down to stay sometimes when any gaieties are going on at Portsmouth or Cowes. He is a thoroughly unscrupulous chap, if all, or even part, of what they say of him is true."

Constance did not reply immediately. Alan stole a glance at her; she was in deep thought. "Alan," she said, softly, "I wanted so much to see you, to speak to you. I saw you pass the Tower just now, and I came to speak to you."

"I dared not hope. I tried not to hope for this," he said, turning his eyes away.

"I did not want to speak to you about myself, but your mother, Alan. Oh, why will you not consent to leave the army? She is breaking her heart about you."

"I know. I was with her all yesterday. My father has gone to London for a day or two, so I got leave and stole

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home. Heaven ! how sweet it is to be in the old house and to talk with the mother !”

“ I thought Mrs. Musgrave was away with your sister.”

“ No ; she came back last Saturday, or I should not have ventured, you may be sure.” He laughed harshly.

“ But, Alan, will you not for your mother's sake accept Mr. Musgrave's offer to buy you out ? You ought ; indeed, you ought ! And you know Mr. Morris is still willing to take you back.”

“ He was always good enough to me. But no, Constance. Let me call you so once more. The step I have taken is irrevocable. I have 'listed for life, and I hope to make something of it yet. How would it be with me if I accepted my father's offer ? The shame of drawing back ! The sense of unmerited obligation ! I have disappointed them all, but I may yet retrieve. No, Constance, what I have done *is* done. I have turned my back on England. I believe we are on the roster for Bombay next year. I could *not* stay *here*, Constance. *You* know I could not !”

“ I do, I do, most bitterly !”

“ That need not be. The world is before us both. Let us cultivate forgetfulness. So far as I am concerned you are free as air, and to help you, believe me, I, too, will try to forget. I am twenty-one and a trifle, you are but just eighteen. At these ages the past is too short to worry. When I am a colonel I may meet you as a duchess. The colonelcy of a regiment will be a greater uprise to me than the strawberry leaves to you. They belong to your class.”

“ I do not care what belongs to me. Oh, Alan, is your life intolerable ?”

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"By no means. Nothing is intolerable which you have made up your mind to bear. For a sober, resolute man there is a future, even in the ranks."

"Ah, Alan ! but for me."

"But for you I should never have known the charm, the possibilities of life. I am grateful for what you have taught me ; your lessons will rest in my heart forever. I unconsciously did you a wrong when, when I dared to love you. You must put me out of your heart, your thoughts. Come, credit me with the self-abnegation of such a request. Yet it is in earnest, Constance, my sweet, my queen ! If it saves you anything, do not think of me, do not trouble about me."

"Alan ! oh, Alan !" Her voice broke. She sank upon a grass-grown stone and, covering her face with her hands, she sobbed bitterly.

"Constance, take care ! We are not alone. You must be brave, dear. We are both helpless. A few years hence and you will wonder at your own weakness. You undervalue yourself. Help me by your courage. Oh, God ! Constance, I wish I had not come !"

"Don't say that !" she returned, struggling to regain command of her voice. "It has been a comfort to your dear mother to see you, and to me, for we must encourage each other to forget. Oh, Alan ! will Mrs. Musgrave ever forgive me for being the cause of your leaving home and disappointing all of you ?"

"She does forgive you. She is sorry for both of us. They, both father and mother, will forgive everything if I succeed. I only wish I had 'listed some years ago, before you had learned

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to care for me, and when the war would have given me chances that will be hard to find now."

"What is to be will be," murmured Constance.

They sat silently side by side for a minute or two.

"I must not stay," exclaimed Constance, suddenly. "I should not have tried to meet you had I not hoped to persuade you——"

"To leave the army?" he interrupted. "No; I have taken my line and I shall stick to it! We are a curious couple, eh, dear? Meeting, not to vow eternal fidelity, but as quick forgetfulness as we can manage. Look at me, Constance. I want to draw the last gleams of those sweet eyes, the last I shall see for many a day, into my heart to keep it warm and clean. I must not keep you. Do you know, you, my darling, how fondly, how passionately I love you! even more dearly than life! for I can resign you rather than attempt to drag you out of your own sphere!"

He took and fondly pressed her hand. Then rose and whistled to his dog.

"I am glad you have a nice, sensible-looking girl to wait on you," he said, in an altered tone. "It looks like the beginning of better times. God be with you, Constance. Good-bye!" And he strode quickly away over the heather till he reached a short distance, when he turned, waved his hand, stood still an instant, then facing round again, went steadily on towards the farther side of the moor.

Constance sat quite still, partly calmed by the sight of her lover's resolute self-control, partly numbed by the bitter pang of letting him go. "Never!" What an awful word it was! Never to see him again! How was she to bear her

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life? What a misfortune she had been to him ! What could she do to atone for the mischief she had wrought ? Was this the outcome of that blissful day when, in climbing a fence between her aunt's property and the Musgraves' farm, she slipped and fell into Alan's arms, which enclosed her in a long, passionate embrace, while in brief burning words he told her how he had struggled in vain against the strong love for her which had grown with his growth, and now had suddenly mastered him. What happy hours ensued ! She knew him so well ; she had grown so gently, so unconsciously, to love him dearly, to trust him utterly. For Alan was masterful, and old, or rather mature, for his years.

Then came a moment of awakening and pain when he roused her from her day-dreams by placing the difference of their position, the hopelessness of their affection, before her, and next the terrible project of his flight from home, his renunciation of all family ties to escape the intolerable pain of being "so near and yet so far" from the heaven of her presence.

All this passed swiftly through her brain, making her deaf and blind to the present.

"Excuse me, miss, but it wants but five minutes to one, and you know her ladyship does not like lunch to be kept waiting."

At these matter-of-fact words the sweet, sad visions fled away, and Constance rose up, white, tremulous, but resolved.

"Thank you," she said, "I had forgotten," and turned her face towards her unhomelike home, which they reached in almost unbroken silence.

There they found a fly from Rockingham at the entrance,

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from which Tom Vivian's valet and the old butler were busy removing a portmanteau and other impedimenta.

Constance paused and drew a long breath. "It must be Rex Vivian who has arrived," she said.

"Oh, dear, miss," exclaimed Barbara, "and your dress not half finished!"

"What matter, Barbara?"

"Well, miss, her ladyship was so very particular as to its being ready on Tuesday, and the gentleman was to come that day, I thought."

"Oh, I dare say my aunt wished him to report progress to his sister, who persuaded her to dress me like a gentlewoman. Rex Vivian can always make Aunt Elizabeth do anything; she minds no one else."

"Anyway, miss, come in by the little side door, and put your hair right before you go in to luncheon."

When Constance entered the smaller dining-room, which Lady Glengarvon habitually used, she had only just begun to carve the lamb, which was the mainstay of the mid-day meal, the baroness's table being largely supplied from her farm.

"Where have you been, Constance? I sent to look for you in vain. Rex was so alarmed by my account of Tom that he came down at once. You see the effect of your carelessness in allowing that poor boy to have such a shock."

Rex, who had risen to greet her with a smile, walked round the table to shake hands with Constance. "I hope the effect does not seem so disastrous to you as to Lady Glengarvon, as its chief consequence is to bring me here a little sooner," he said.

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"No; I am glad you have come, as my aunt has been so uneasy," returned Constance truthfully, and she took her place at table.

Vivian gave her a long, penetrating look, as if something unusual in her expression or aspect had attracted his attention.

"Some claret, Constance?" he asked presently.

"She only takes water," said her aunt for her.

"That's very ethereal and all right. But to-day Constance looks as if she, too, had had a shock, and a sharp one. I prescribe more than claret, even sparkling Burgundy."

"That is a desperate remedy," began Constance.

"My dear child, do as you are bid."

"A little claret, then." And she felt the better of swallowing some, for the interview with young Musgrave had shaken her sorely.

"I don't see that anything is the matter with Constance," said Lady Glengarvon, looking at her niece. "She never has much colour. I rather think she over-fatigues herself. She never sits down to work or to study. She is always rambling about the moors or the woods."

"By herself?" asked Vivian, in an interrogative tone.

"Chiefly; but now she has this new maid your sister bullied me into giving her, she goes with, she seems a quiet, sensible girl."

"Oh, she doesn't count," said Vivian, carelessly. "You ride, of course, Constance?"

"I can manage my pony, that's all, and he is too small for me now."

"I saw the very thing for you at Tattersall's the day before yesterday,—a perfect lady's horse. You must let me present

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it to Constance, my dear cousin, then I can escort her across country. Eh, Constance?"

"My dear Rex——" began the baroness, in a deprecating tone.

"Thank you," put in Constance quickly. "Do not put yourself to trouble or expense on my account; it is not worth while."

"Why? Don't you care for riding?"

"No; nor for anything much." She rose and left the room.

"This is tragic!" said Vivian, looking after her, with a smile. "What is the matter? Have you been chastising that proud young spirit?"

"Nonsense, Rex! I never interfere with Constance, and hitherto she has given me no trouble. Indeed, I never heard such a speech from her lips before."

"There's something wrong," said Vivian, reflectively. "She has had a terribly monotonous life. It must have dulled her vitality. It is time I took her in hand. That little glimpse of a rebellious spirit makes her interesting. I fancy we understand each other, my dear kinswoman. You would like Constance and myself to make a match of it?"

"Yes, Rex, I think that would be the best arrangement for all parties. Though I dare say Constance thinks me harsh and indifferent, I am really most anxious for her welfare to secure her future. I have saved some money, which I should like to make a dowry for her; but in truth I hate the idea of alienating it from the estate. If you marry her, why, I can secure it for your joint lives, and give you the income at once. But you must remember, Rex, I know nothing of your financial position."

"Quite true, baroness; but I am willing to give you the

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fullest information anyhow. It will be a gratification to you that Constance should one day wear the coronet to which your admirable management has given a certain weight of metal it has not had for many a day."

"I have done my best, my very best," she said as if to herself, a far-away look in her eyes, as if she were reviewing the past twenty-five years of ceaseless effort. But she resumed, recalling herself: "Do not imagine I have done much beyond clearing the estate." And she looked suspiciously at him.

"My dear cousin, *that* was a sufficiently herculean labour. The result hardly repays you, nor can your unfortunate heir get much out of the inheritance; a few hundreds a year would give him all he can possibly want."

"Yes, poor boy! But he will not want that little long."

"There I think you are mistaken. Idiots are very long-lived."

"Yes, if healthy. But Tom's lungs are in a very bad state, and his nerves. Why, they are mere tissue-paper. At all events I mean to bar the way for a good many years."

"Right! May you live forever!"

Lady Glengarvon looked at Vivian, and a little cynical, crooked smile curled the corners of her wide, firm mouth. "Anyhow, I shall not outlive Tom *and* you, and we had better allow ten years for decrepitude. So on the whole my hopes are centred on you. They say you have led rather a wild life, but I know nothing about it. I think I see glimpses of ambition in you, and to succeed in England you must have a character for prudence, for thought——"

"How about Sheridan, Fox, etc., etc.?" he interrupted.

"They came to grief because their brilliant genius, their

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great gifts, were not supported by solid feet of clay,—self-governance and calculation. I confess it pleases me to think of having you and Constance to take care of me by and by, when the days grow long and dreary.”

“Why this sentimental tone, my dear baroness? Your grand vitality will last for many a year.” Lady Glengarvon did not reply, and after a brief silence she resumed :

“I suppose you do not dislike the idea of marrying Constance, for I don't want her to be miserable?”

“You don't suppose I should be uncivil to my wife? No gentlemen would be.”

“Perhaps not, Rex. But they can be cruel.”

“My dear cousin, this is a new departure. You don't fancy that girls of your niece's grade marry on the love-in-a-cottage system,—devotion, undying affection, and all that? They want a good position, a good settlement, a decently respectful husband, with a good name to bequeath his children ; and a very decent sort of ambition it is. Families started on this principle are the mainstay of a country.”

“Certainly, certainly, Rex. But I have spasms of distrust as to your making a good husband ; and though Constance seems to me cold and reserved, she might not like to be neglected.”

“Of course not. Well, baroness, you must do what you like. At present I am rather impecunious and may long continue to be, as poor Tom may outlive me. But if he were to go off the hooks, why, the world of women is before me where to choose, and, as you say, Constance is not too sympathetic to me or to any one, though possibly there may be fire beneath the snow. I must try and find out.”

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Here the butler entered. "If you please, Mr. Vivian, Master Tom has been asking for you, and Mr. Morris is here, my lady."

"Show him into my study," said Lady Glengarvon. "Come, Rex, if you have finished, I will go with you to see Tom. You will find him greatly shaken."

"It is most unfortunate," he returned, impatiently. "Have you told Musgrave to keep that infernal dog chained up?"

"I will."

They rose and left the room together.

CHAPTER V.

THEY found the idiot boy in a fever of expectation, and he greeted Vivian with demonstrations of joy and affection most distressing and rather revolting to their object. He strove hard to speak clearly and describe the terror he was in of the dog, but his excitement made him more than usually unintelligible. There was no mistake, however, in his emphatic objection to the baroness, whom he disliked extremely. He pointed his long, lean forefinger at her, and almost shrieked an emphatic "Go!"

Lady Glengarvon was quite unmoved; she smiled indulgently, and said, "Very well; shall I send Constance to you?"

Tom Vivian did not reply; so she left him to his guardian, who always seemed to exercise an exhilarating effect upon him.

"It is as well that poor boy stands between Rex and Glen-

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garvon," she mused, as she paused in a wide projecting window which lighted the staircase and gazed out over the wide stretch of grass land and woods, upland and rich, level fields which later on would be golden with ripe corn,—all, or nearly all, her own. "Rex will be the best-looking baron Glengarvon has known for many a year; we are a hard-featured race. But the property needs more than looks, and a few years longer will steady him thoroughly. I fancy he begins to think of a career,—a political career. This will fit him for his future duties. Nothing gives a man so much importance, so much influence, as political success. While Tom lives his trustees will keep a very tight hand on Rex, as they ought. Property is a sacred trust. But they don't like Rex. I wonder why. Probably they know more than I do. Still, I must accept him as my heir, and my life is not so good a one as it seems. Yet I am not dissatisfied. I have accomplished almost all I wanted. Not every woman of fifty can say——" She stood for a few minutes looking out over her beloved territory, and then slowly descended to the inner hall of the rambling, much-added-to house.

Meantime, Mr. Jonathan Morris, the well-known lawyer of Rockborough, whose mental notes and deed-boxes held the secrets, creditable and discreditable, of most gentle and noble families in Northshire, had made himself at home in the baroness's study, which was almost as familiar to him as his own private office.

He took up the *Times*, which lay on a large table loaded with papers, and walked to the window, where he stood for a moment, the newspaper under his left arm, in order to refresh himself with a pinch of snuff, and stood there a moment in

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deep thought. He was a lean, small man with a long, narrow head, covered with thick dark hair, so accurately divided on the left side that every beholder suspected him of wearing a wig. He had a short, broad face, much weather-beaten and dried up, with the bloom on it, and a wide, thin-lipped mouth, which had a way of smiling up in a slant towards his right eye, which, with its fellow, twinkled in a knowing observant fashion, save when their owner half closed them, against the optics of others.

Mr. Morris had closed his old-fashioned snuff-box of tortoise-shell inlaid with silver, and was returning it to his pocket, when the door opened and Barbara walked in. She paused, not seeing Morris at first, and looked round as if in search of some one.

Mr. Morris gazed at her with such earnest attention that he forgot to withdraw his hand from his pocket.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, sir!" said Barbara, suddenly perceiving him.

"Granted, my good girl," he returned, in a dry, stuffy voice. "But don't go. You are looking for some one, eh?"

"Yes, sir; I wanted to speak to her ladyship."

"She'll be here directly. You're—you're a stranger here, eh? I never saw you before, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I am a stranger. I am Miss Morton's maid."

"Oh! ah! indeed. What's your name, eh?"

"Barbara West, sir," in some surprise at this prying little man.

"Barbara West, hey? Seems to me I have heard that name before; but I know so many people. Where do you come from, my good girl, Thirlstane, Newcastle, eh?"

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"No, sir ; I am a Londoner."

"Ha ! can't go beyond London for fashion and finery ! Well, you've a nice young mistress, see you serve her well."

"Such is my desire, sir," returned Barbara, coldly, thinking this queer little man was taking liberties. She turned to leave him and met Lady Glengarvon coming in.

"What do you want, Barbara ?" she asked, a little surprised to find her niece's maid in the sacred study.

"If you please, my lady, Miss Morton sent me to say she was lying down with a terribly bad headache, and would you excuse her going out with Master Vivian this afternoon."

"A headache ! She never used to have headaches, at least not till last year. She goes out too much in the sun. Go and tell her to stay in her room till dinner-time ; then I hope and expect she will be able to join us. Have you finished that dress yet ?"

"Not quite, my lady ; the corsage is completed, but the skirt——"

"You have been an age about it," interrupted the baroness.

"Can she wear it to-morrow ?"

"Yes, my lady, for dinner ; and I must say there are a great many stitches——"

"That will do," imperiously interrupting her and waving her hand in sign of dismissal.

"Well, Morris," continued Lady Glengarvon, as Barbara vanished, "you wanted to see me." And she seated herself at her table, an indication that she was ready for business. Jonathan Morris was perhaps the only confidential friend she had in the world, though in domestic matters she greatly trusted her maid and housekeeper Wylie.

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"Yes, Lady Glengarvon," said the lawyer, taking the chair she pointed. "I wanted to report progress in that affair of Dunford's."

"I hope you have made some," she returned, opening a drawer and taking out several neat bundles of letters duly docketed and red-taped.

"Has he paid up yet?"

"Well, no. You see——"

"No, I do not see any reason for the delay. It has been a good season. All Rockborough gave dinners during the races, and the mayor's election, and every bit of fruit at all these feasts came from my hot-houses. Still the man never pays me a penny of that twenty-five pounds, now due over four months. This won't do, Morris."

"No, my lady. It must be cleared finally, but at present I think it will defeat your own ends to press the man. He has had losses, and if you come down on him he will come to a smash, and no one will get a penny. You give him time and he'll pay you. I am certain he will."

"There is some truth in what you say, Morris. See this man and say that I will consent to take five pounds down and five pounds every three months till the whole is liquidated."

"That's better, Lady Glengarvon. I dare say Dunford may be able to manage that; but, believe me, it would not pay you to ruin him." The conversation ran on in a purely financial strain for some time, and then the lawyer rose to take his leave, with the usual mixture of warm admiration for the baroness's business faculties and resentment at her unflinching hardness.

"And pray how is Master Vivian?" he asked.

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"Far from well. That big mastiff of the Musgraves' gave him an awful fright a few days ago. He was fairly well before that. They must not let the brute out of bounds. By the way, have you heard anything of their second boy,—the one apprenticed to you?"

"He is here now. Ran down to see his mother while Musgrave was away. He has enlisted in the Redcar Rifles, the Seventieth Regiment, I think. It has been a terrible blow to the family, and no one can understand why he did it. I can't find out that he was in any scrape. He had just finished his time with me, and I was not disinclined to take him into partnership if old Musgrave could have produced the cash, when off he starts and enlists. They kept it quiet for a long time, wanting to buy him out, but nothing would move him; he has been a year with the regiment now, and hopes to be a sergeant in a few months. They go to India in November, and I don't suppose we'll ever see him again."

"A bad business," observed the baroness. "There must be some reason at the bottom of his madness which he would rather not tell. Really, men are awfully weak and wrong-headed; the more I see of them the more they amaze me."

"Men and women both are rather astonishing," said the lawyer, drily.

Lady Glengarvon laughed. "You are quite philosophic," she said. "But I am sorry for Mrs. Musgrave. I shall go and see her some day. They are really most respectable people. By the way, Mr. Vivian is here; came to-day."

"Oh, indeed. He'll miss Sir Robert and Lady Elmore. He used to be quite at home at Brydon Hall," said the lawyer, with a sardonic grin.

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"True," returned Lady Glengarvon, looking sharply at him. "They are abroad, are they not?"

"They are, and have been for the last year. Lady Elmore has been in very bad health, and Sir Robert is yachting somewhere."

"Ah! modern husbands and wives wander about freely enough, unhampered by each other."

"Bad, ain't it, my lady? But, worst of all, is where a wicked man takes advantage of an innocent, trusting woman."

"Why, Morris, you'll write a touching novel with a purpose one of these days, you are growing so sentimental," said the baroness, with a dry laugh. "Good-morning. Let me know what you have settled with Dunford. By the way, I see there's a new green-grocerman set up in North Gate Street near the market."

"Yes, his name is Cohen. I am told he gets all his fruit from London and sells at very low prices."

"Indeed. Then we must uphold Dunford."

"Just so. I wish your ladyship good-day."

Lady Glengarvon looked after the parting guest with a thoughtful smile. "What reminiscences of the Northshire landed gentry Morris could write! They would be a mine of wealth to novelists and anecdote-mongers. But he is silent as the grave. Thank God! there is nothing to know or to tell about me; but I fancy no one was so much in my poor brother's confidence as Morris. He is fond of us all, too." She drew her portfolio to her and began to write.

Presently Vivian strolled into the room and drew an easy-chair near Lady Glengarvon.

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"Well?" she said, laying down her pen with a questioning glance.

"It is not 'well' by any means with that poor boy," he returned. "He seems to have had a great shock. I am going to take him out for a drive. It seems he never feels safe out driving except with me. The air and rapid motion will do him good. I suppose you have something on four legs in your stable?"

"You had better take the ponies. The old horse I have for the brougham would not go fast enough for you."

"You really ought not to deny yourself the necessities, nay, decencies, of life, my dear cousin. It is absurd. Let me choose——"

"No, thank you," she interrupted. "What I need I know best myself, and how to choose myself."

"Why don't you start a horse-breeding establishment? There are great facilities here. Appoint *me* your manager. I should be glad of the salary. At present I am starving in the midst of plenty, as you know."

"What I should like to know, Rex, is what your idea of starvation is."

"Pretty much the same as other people's." He was silent for a moment, and then continued: "I don't think that man is at all fitted to be Tom's attendant. I fancy that a motherly, elderly woman would suit him better than any male nurse. He is evidently fond of women in his blind way. By the way, as well as I could make out, he wants Constance to come with us this afternoon."

"I don't think she can; she has a headache and is lying down."

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"What ! is Constance developing nerves? That is quite unexpected !"

"But so it is. I think you are right, Rex. I don't think Marks suits Tom. Probably, as you say, it would be better to engage a woman, and much less expensive."

"No doubt," he replied, with a smile. "I shall write to Chaldecott by this afternoon's post and give as accurate an account of the boy's condition as I can. He will judge then if he ought to come down or not. I don't want him to leave town unless it is incumbent on him to see his patient."

"Why?"

"Because he is trying to win the consent of a stony-hearted father to his marriage with a charming young lady."

"I didn't think he was a fool."

"Nor is he. At least not worse than his neighbours. People still believe in myths about matrimony and a happy home. Chaldecott's choice seems a sensible, ladylike young woman, and it strikes me that poor boy might safely be committed to their care, and so save us a world of worry. A woman at the head of affairs would make all the difference in the world."

"Perhaps so. At all events, it is worth thinking about. But nothing can relieve us from our responsibility, and we must always assure ourselves by personal inspection that every care is taken of him."

"Of course, of course. And it seems to me that his breathing is more laboured than it was."

"Unfortunate creature ! I think it is."

Vivian looked at his watch. "I must get back in time to

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write for the post ; so the sooner we are off the better. I'll go round to the stables and hurry your people. I fancy they are rather rusty, rheumatic functionaries."

"They answer my purpose," said the baroness, as he left the room.

The sound of the ponies's feet and Vivian's voice reached Constance as she lay silent and still on the sofa in her room, with aching heart and throbbing temples striving to reconcile herself to the inevitable.

"Barbara," she called softly, and Barbara, who was at work in the next room, with the door between them open, came. "Look, and tell me who is going out."

"Mr. Vivian and your cousin, miss."

"They are neither of them my cousins, though they seem like relations. Then Mr. Vivian is going to give Tom a drive. It will do him good. Rex is very kind to his ward. I always like him best when he is with Tom."

"He is a fine, elegant-looking gentleman, to be sure !" exclaimed Barbara. "It is a pity you can't go down to dinner, miss, the first day there is any company. But you will be all right to-morrow, and your dress finished."

"I am most thankful to be here in peace. I do not like Rex Vivian. I used to hate him, but not now. I don't hate any one or like any one. Rex used always to laugh at me, and treat me like some specimen of half-savage life. He used to offend me dreadfully, much more than he thought. Then I ceased to care about it, and he grew better, and tried to make friends with me as if I were a baby. I do not like Rex Vivian, and I am ashamed of feeling a degree of fear when he is near me."

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"Oh, dear miss ! that is only because you have lived so much alone. A gentleman like Mr. Vivian would be sure to want to make himself pleasant to you, and, you see, miss, he is your equal and——" Barbara hesitated and ran aground.

Constance raised her wistful, expressive eyes and looked earnestly, sternly, at her maid, then she asked, "What do you mean?"

"Mean, miss!" repeated Barbara, a little confused; "well, just what I said, miss."

Constance did not reply immediately, but again fixing her eyes on Barbara, said in a low tone, "Things may puzzle you, and you may be sorry to see me unhappy, but you must *never* speak to me or to any one else about—about to-day." She flushed to the roots of her hair and then grew very pale.

"That I never will, 'm; you may trust me. Let me bathe your brow again with some *eau de Cologne* and water. You do look bad."

"Yes, pray do," said Constance; and then as Barbara bent over her, with a sudden impulse she threw her arms round her, and, leaning her head on her shoulder, burst into a long but quiet fit of weeping.

"Don't try to stop yourself, miss; it will do you good," whispered the sympathetic girl.

When some hours after the dinner-bell rang, Constance was quite composed, and received her aunt gratefully, answering her inquiries and promising to be quite well and downstairs the following day; so Lady Glengarvon found nothing unusual in her niece's voice or manner, or to change her idea that Constance was rather a commonplace, immature girl, little

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dreaming what bitter-sweet memories, what passionate regrets, what earnest resolutions, struggled in that young heart and stirred her rapidly developing nature.

CHAPTER VI.

"My noble kinswoman is very keen on her project of wedding me to her niece," ran the concluding paragraphs of Vivian's letter to Dr. Chaldecott. "More so than she was last year. This puts me in a corner. Of course I do not much care who I marry; perhaps it is preferable not to marry at all. Only, if one attempts a political career, a wife guarantees some degree of respectability. Anyhow, in poor Tom's present state of health, I may at any day be free, rich, and quite independent of Constance Morton and the dowery Lady Glengarvon talks of bestowing on her. I find that young lady improved since last year. She has more grace, more expression, and, might I fancy, be taught to use those uncommonly fine eyes of hers; there's more soul in her face, too. She is still an awful guy, poor child, as to dress, and must really go through a couple of seasons in town before I can venture to marry her. Meantime, I am no favourite. It used to be amusing to rub her up the wrong way; but to-day she appeared deadly indifferent. However, I think I can change that, if it interests me to do so and I think it worth while.

"Meantime, go on with your work, and have all preparations made before you come down here. Remember the famous maxim which has led many to success, 'Be bold!' and

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never dream of failure. Let me have the fullest details from day to day.

"Yours always,

"REX VIVIAN."

It was a deadly dull evening that first one. Though Lady Glengarvon postponed dinner three-quarters of an hour in deference to her cousin's tastes and habits, it seemed to him appallingly early. Then his hostess was unusually silent. Generally they had many subjects in common, touching the Glengarvon property, its management and prospects, also Vivian's dawning ambition, which interested her greatly. But to-night she seemed preoccupied, and Vivian more than once wished for the diversion of teasing Constance Morton.

He grew intensely weary of watching the movement of Lady Glengarvon's hands and hearing the click of her knitting-needles, for her summer evenings' occupation was preparing thick woollen winter socks for her poor people.

"It seems to me that the prices of agricultural produce are slowly but surely going down," she said suddenly, as if out of her thoughts. "I was talking to Morris about it to-day. He is a very shrewd, clever old man, and has immense experience."

"And is an interfering, presumptuous old busybody into the bargain," returned Rex, with a kind of bitter impatience. "I am amazed that you believe in him so firmly, considering you are a woman of common sense and penetration."

The baroness looked up with some surprise. "And considering I have known and transacted business with him for

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twenty-five years, I ought to know whether he is worthy of confidence or not. I am aware he does not work for nothing. I should not trust him if he pretended to do so ; but he has been the greatest help to me. Indeed, only for his assistance I should never have accomplished half what I have done."

"You have too modest an estimate of your own powers, my dear cousin. I could tell you of a case where the snuffy old sinner did a lot of gratuitous mischief."

"When you tell me the facts of the case, I can judge how far Morris was to blame," she returned, drily.

"Oh, I am not to be induced to detail a lot of country town gossip !" exclaimed Vivian, laughing. "I never liked old Morris and never shall, so I may be a little prejudiced. Constance too seedy to appear ?"

"Yes ; she has had these headaches occasionally of late, and I think they are severe."

"I dare say she is moped to death. Let me get her a horse and teach her to ride. It would do her more good than any other prescription. Seriously, my dear cousin, Constance ought to be presented and have a season in town. It would make a new creature of her."

"She can do all that after she is married."

"True ; but the training would be good for her and a help to me. However, some months must pass before my suggestion can be carried out, so you'll have time to make up your mind. But I must not keep you up. You like early hours, I know."

He rose from the chair in which he had been lounging, and wishing Lady Glengarvon good-night went away to his own

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room, where he sought solace in a big cigar and a French novel.

The next day Vivian received various letters, evidently more or less satisfactory, and went off with one of Lady Glen-garvon's keepers (for the châtelaine preserved the game carefully and let her moors at a good rent) for a long ramble with a view to ascertaining the promise of birds, the baroness having graciously offered him the shooting for August and September.

His afflicted ward inquired for him in vain, refusing to be comforted because he was not, until Constance, hearing the hubbub, offered to accompany him in his outing, and the day passed over as usual.

"How long must I stay here *en retraite*?" thought Vivian, as he dressed for dinner. "It is an awful experience. I suppose a week or ten days will see me through it. By the way," he said aloud to his ward's servant, who was waiting on him, as he came without his own valet, "I suppose you are pretty sick of your service here. It is a place more suited to some kindly old woman than a strapping young fellow like you?"

"Well, sir, it is rather quiet, and Master Vivian is a trifle trying; but the wages is good, and when we are in town things are rather livelier."

"I suppose they are. Have you ever been abroad? Do you know anything of sport?"

"Yes, sir; I was with Sir Arthur Loftus in the Pyrenees, and all through Spain."

"He would recommend you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir; I have every right to think he would." A few

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more questions, and Vivian offered to mention him to a friend who was going to shoot elephants in South Africa.

The man caught at the suggestion, and Vivian promised to write his friend on the subject.

When Vivian entered the gaunt, old-fashioned drawing-room, which had seen no new thing in the shape of furniture or decoration for over thirty years, the first object which caught his eye was Constance Morton sitting in a big bay window, through the upper part of which the westering sunlight cast golden gleams on her nut-brown hair. She held some knitting in her hands, but they were quite still, and there was something utterly despondent in her attitude and the droop of her graceful head. She was pale, too, but she smiled more graciously than usual as he approached.

"Ah, Constance, I hope the headache is gone and that you are all right again."

"Thank you, it is, though I was out a long time with Tom this morning, and that is rather a test."

"It is, indeed. Why, Constance, you have a new dress! Will you not stand up and let me see how it goes? I am a capital judge of dress, I assure you."

"You will see quite enough of it when we go in to dinner," said Constance, quietly, but with a gleam of amusement in her eyes, "and probably more than enough before you leave this."

The garment in question was silvery grey, with foamy tulle ruchings. It fitted well, and, as Constance had looked at herself in the glass before descending to the drawing-room, it suddenly dawned upon her that she had a figure.

"You are by no means gracious to me, Constance. By the

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way, is my sister's *protégée* a success? You see I know all the secrets of the prison-house, and a prison-house, I fear, this old place is to you."

"Oh, yes. I am so much obliged to Mrs. Quentin for sending Barbara to me. She is such a nice girl and very little older than myself. She made this dress. Is it not well done?" (forgetting her dignity in her wish to do her new handmaid full justice.)

"Admirably," said Vivian, looking at her with searching eyes, from which she shrank, fearing that he might discover and ruthlessly drag to light the precious secret of her soul. "By Jove! it is scandalous to think of the way you have been neglected."

"Hush, Mr. Vivian! Considering that I have nothing I can call my own, my aunt has been very good and generous to me."

"Generous!" he repeated, raising his eyebrows with a look of astonishment. "And may I ask why you always call me Mr. Vivian?"

Here Lady Glengarvon came in, and the dinner-bell rang at the same moment. As they went into dinner Vivian examined the full-length view of the famous gown.

Dinner was gone through with some languid intermittent attempts at talk, the hostess being evidently preoccupied and Constance very silent.

Evening was fast closing in when they crossed the hall after rising from table.

"What a glorious evening!" exclaimed Vivian. "Suppose we go and enjoy it out-of-doors?"

"Yes," returned Constance, after a brief pause, "anything is better than staying in."

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"Will you permit us?" said Vivian courteously to the baroness.

"Yes, go. I have some business letters to write. Go and amuse yourselves."

Constance caught up a white Shetland shawl which lay on a table with other out-door wraps and threw it over her head, and Vivian put on a soft felt hat, then they sallied forth, and he turned his steps towards the wood, but Constance halted. "We shall see nothing down there. Let us go to the edge of the moor, there is such a glorious view there. It gives one a sense of freedom."

"And you have been a caged bird so long."

Constance laughed, a soft, low laugh as if to herself.

"Is that all the thanks I get for my sympathy?" asked Vivian, pleasantly.

"You see sympathy from *you* is a new thing."

"That is a cruel speech. I did not think you bore malice."

"No, I do not. But I have generally been an object of derision, not of sympathy. Naturally enough, I know I used to be very ill-tempered and absurd, Mr. Vivian."

"And pray why Mr. Vivian? Why put me off at such an enormous distance? I shall be obliged to call you Miss Morton."

"As you like. I do not care about such things now."

"How is that? Grown old perhaps before your years? or don't you like me enough to give me my Christian name?"

"Possibly," with a dreamy look in her eyes and speaking slowly and gently. "You can never be Rex to me."

Her voice and manner took away from the notion of any-

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thing inimical, and Vivian said to himself, "I'll give the lie to that yet."

"Then is this intended to warn me from addressing you as Constance? I hope not. Constance has a great charm for me. I prefer it to Miss Morton."

"Call me what you like," she returned, in a weary tone. "I do not care."

"Constance!" he exclaimed in a more serious tone. "What has happened? You are not like the girl I left here last autumn. She was full of life and spirit, though shy and quiet ready to show fight on any provocation. Now you are indifferent to everything. *Now* when you have a charming new dress, the offer of a horse all to yourself, and a maid to wait on you."

"These are treasures sufficient to gladden the heart of any girl," she said, with a smile. "I suppose I am growing wiser, or——" She stopped.

"You puzzle me greatly. This is more like despondency than wisdom. Come, my sweet enemy, confide in me. What weighs upon your heart or spirit? You have been victimised by that wretched boy? or you want to try your wings and soar beyond Glengarvon? Now I can help you——"

"Yes," she interrupted, with a little more animation, "I do want to leave Glengarvon. Yet it will break my heart to go."

"Hearts are tough things, my dear Constance, and to a young creature like *you* the world is most fascinating. Think of your presentation, of the balls, the theatres, the dinners, then the concerts, the garden-parties, the etceteras. I am sure my sister would be delighted to take you out. Give me carte-blanche and I'll bring your aunt round."

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Constance fixed her lustrous eyes on his for an instant. "Yes," she said, "I should like to see the world of men and women; but just think of all my clothes would cost. You are a bold man to promise such a miracle as to bring my aunt round."

"It will be a case of faith healing, and you must believe in me and trust me and like me, or I shall never succeed."

"Unfortunately," she returned, in the same gentle deliberate tone, "I do not believe in you or trust you, or even like you."

"Heavens!" cried Vivian, half amused, wholly interested. "This is annihilating. How can you wound me so cruelly, and I like you so much?"

"You would be ungrateful if you did not. I have been your only amusement in this dull place."

"What! does my thoughtless chaff still linger in your memory?"

"I rarely remember you now; but I do not dislike you."

"In short, my trivial existence does not create even a ripple in the current of your thoughts?"

"Yes, it will after to-day, for I think you wish to be kind to me." She suddenly caught his wrist and held it tightly with a feverish hand. "Yes, do help me! Get me a horse that will need all my strength and courage to master! Persuade my aunt to give me lovely clothes and leave to stay with your sister, to see beautiful people and hear music and laughter. It kills me to be dull and sad when I could enjoy. Oh, how much I could enjoy!"

"What a transformation!" thought Vivian, keeping her

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hand fast in his own, and strangely moved by this glimpse of the glowing nature he did not dream existed under her cold indifference.

"Trust me. It shall not be my fault if I do not show you how to drink deep of life's pleasure. But you must adopt me as your guide and trust me. Hereafter I shall look for my reward, which, I trust, you will give in full measure. This as an instalment." And he kissed the hand he held more than once. "We are to be friends," he continued, as she slowly withdrew it, "and close allies, the alliance dating from this evening, and I am to be Rex in the future."

"I am not sure," she returned rather unsteadily. "When I really like you, Rex will come naturally to my thoughts, to my lips."

"I thought we were to be friends straight off. You have accepted my terms, and to-morrow you shall drive me down to Rockborough and see what old Magill has to show us in the shape of a lady's horse."

"You will never persuade my aunt."

"We'll see about that," cried Vivian in his all-conquering tone, "or——"

"We had better go in now or she will be vexed——"

"Not if she is writing business letters. You don't suppose that you would weigh one pepper-corn against the credit side of her balance-sheet?"

"At least you need not say so," returned Constance, reproachfully.

"It is always wiser to face realities——"

"That requires so much courage." She turned and went towards the Tower. "How lovely it is!" she said half

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to herself. "Though there is no moon the stars are so brilliant, and what a multitude of them!"

"Yes, the star-spangled heaven is always a wonderful sight. I fancy you have a good deal of romance in your composition."

"I do not know." She said, it in a sort of unconscious way, and hardly spoke again till they reached the house. Then she held out her hand and said, "Good-night. I am very tired. You will tell Lady Glengarvon that I have gone to bed." She left him and went rapidly away upstairs.

Barbara was "sorting" some of her young lady's things when Constance came into the room.

"Don't go away," she said; "I shall not return to the drawing-room. I want you to brush my hair. There is a heavy dew to-night, and I have been out with Mr. Vivian to the edge of the moor."

"That is nicer than sitting in-doors this beautiful night, miss."

"I wish I had not gone. I have talked too much and told much more than I intended. I never feel I am with a real friend when I am with Mr. Vivian, though he was nice and kind to-night. But, I do not know how it is, I liked him better than I ever did before; yet I wish I had not said all I did. He seems to read what I think. He makes me tremble sometimes. He cannot know. Oh, if he did!"

"Never you fear, miss. One human being is never so much cleverer than another, especially when there is nothing to find out."

Constance was silent, while the colour mounted in her cheek. She let Barbara throw a muslin wrapper over her, and

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sat down to have her long hair brushed and plaited for the night. Barbara had taken out the comb and unrolled its rich coils before Constance spoke. Then she said, "Barbara, you are a young girl like myself, only you know more——"

"Oh, miss!" interrupted Barbara, in a tone of expostulation.

"Yes, you do. You have had experience and earned your own bread. I have been treated like a baby all my life, and know nothing beyond the bounds of Glengarvon. And you are more sensible than I am, I feel you are, so I will tell you what—what frightens me, especially as you must guess something." She leant forward, her elbows on the dressing-table, her face in her hands. Barbara ceased brushing and stood, brush in hand, respectfully at "attention."

"That young man we met yesterday. He is Alan Musgrave, Farmer Musgrave's second son. I have known him all my life. He is nearly four years older than I am. About a year ago he came back from London, where he had been for some time to finish his apprenticeship or something like that with old Mr. Morris, and one day he told me that he loved—me,—not, you know, as a playfellow or a sister, but as a wife! Then he was in a sort of despair because he had let the words—ah! such words—pass his lips. But I told him not to mind, for I loved him dearly and would never tell any one. Then he explained many things. How he never dared dream of me as a wife, because our stations were so wide apart; that when I had seen more of society—society of my own class—I should probably meet men I should like better and find more suited in all ways to match with me. Oh, I understand that! Not that I ever will love any one as I do Alan, but it would

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vex and shock every one ; then, as my good old French governess used to say, '*Noblesse oblige*' above everything. Mrs. Musgrave, who is so wise and good, spoke to me sweetly, but oh ! so impressively. She showed me that if I did not help her to insist on Alan's giving me up, if I did not break with him, I should spoil his life, for every one would think him base and bad, and his father had done all he could for him and he must now work for himself, for Mr. Musgrave it seems has lost a great deal of money, and is not nearly so well off as people think ; so I made up my mind, and Alan said I was right ; but oh ! Barbara, it was like death to say good-bye. The whole world is changed to me. The next dreadful thing was—he went away and enlisted. He could not stay near us. He could not take up his old life again. His father was furious, for he did not know the real reason, and yesterday when I saw him pass I could not resist stealing out to have a word, just a little word, with him ; he is so grand and brave. Oh, how miserable it all is !”

“That it is, 'm. But you are right, dear Miss Constance ; you never could marry a young—young gentleman for I am sure he looks quite the gentleman like him.”

“He *is* a gentleman, Barbara, quite as much as Rex Vivian. He can talk as well, ride as well, and—and act, I am sure, far more nobly. There, Barbara, I will say no more now. I will try not to speak of him, not to think of him. I can do him no good by thinking of him, but I cannot banish him from my mind, my heart. He haunts my eyes ; he is so grave and calm and resolute and true, I can tell him every thought of my heart. And come what may, he did love me so much—so much that I felt frightened at my own power.

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Oh, Barbara, think of a long life without ever seeing him !”

She rose up, threw back her long hair, and, catching Barbara's arm, suddenly leant her head on the girl's shoulder, and wept long, quietly, bitterly.

And in the presence of this master passion, this burst of blameless natural sorrow, mistress and maid were but a pair of kindly girls, and mingled their tears of sympathy and suffering together.

“Now,” resumed Constance, recovering herself with a long, shivering sigh, “you know why I dread Rex Vivian. Can you not imagine how he would delight to torture and shame me? But you have only *seen* him ; you have no idea the sort of mocking devil which seems to look out of his eyes sometimes. He was repulsive to me always, perhaps because I am sensitive and vain. Oh, yes, I *am* vain ; that is why it vexes me to be made so little of. I am weak, too. This evening is the very first time that Rex ever treated me like a woman, and I am half conciliated already.”

“She'll marry him in the end, I dare say. Mrs. Wylie says that's what her ladyship wants,” thought Barbara.

“Well, miss,” she said, aloud, “it's not for me to speak, but Mr. Vivian *does* look like a prince.”

“I do not know how princes look,” returned Constance, impatiently. “I never saw one.”

“Well, I did, 'm. I saw Prince Albert going to a banquet at the Guildhall.”

“Alan Musgrave is enough of a prince for me.”

“I must say, miss, that he is a handsome, fine-looking——”

“Barbara, you are *not* to talk to me about him ; mind that.

Barbara : Lady's Maid and Peeress

Stop me if I begin. I have taken you for a friend, so you must help me."

"Indeed, I'll try, Miss Constance."

CHAPTER VII.

FOR the next two or three days Constance saw very little of Vivian. He went out with Lady Glengarvon, and also showed much kind attention to his unfortunate ward. Constance, too, made a habit of leaving the table as soon as the cloth was removed, for the conversation generally took a financial turn. The baroness was deeply interested in the share market and delighted to pick up crumbs of information respecting it.

In the mornings she plied her needle diligently under Barbara's direction, but never while Vivian was in the house did she indulge her favourite pastime of practising on the piano in a vague and desultory manner.

The weather had changed and a couple of evenings proved wet and windy.

"Don't desert us in this determined way, Constance," he said, as she rose from her seat as usual. "Pray come into the drawing-room; I have something to tell which I hope will please you."

"Yes, Constance, it is not civil to run off in this way. What do you do all the evening? Come and sing Rex a border ballad. You have rather a sweet voice, and if it had been cultivated——" She paused.

Barbara : Lady's Maid and Peeress

"Then, my dear cousin, why didn't you cultivate it?" cried Vivian, impatiently.

"Ah! there was so much to be done, and I didn't think about it."

"It's never too late to mend. Send Constance to town for lessons in the winter, for the drawing-room in the spring, and then——"

"Then I shall be a travelled monkey," put in Constance.

"Well, go and sing at all events, and let Rex judge for himself. I have one or two letters which must go to-night."

Constance walked into the drawing-room obediently, closely followed by Vivian. A bright fire of logs was glowing in the grate, to the surprise of Constance.

"How delightful a fire is, though it is one of the last days of July! It quite changes this gloomy old room."

"Yes. You are the most extraordinary set of people here I ever encountered. You haven't the smallest idea even of ordinary comfort. Lady Glengarvon has the tastes and tendencies of a first-class anchorite. Come, here is a comfortable chair, and here are some cushions," snatching them from a sofa. "Do arrange them luxuriously. I must not offer my services, so I shall lie at your feet on this fine bearskin. Now, shall I tell my news, or will you sing me a song?"

"Oh, no! I could not," in a despairing tone.

"Pray don't, unless you like it. I don't care a rap for music, and I am exceedingly happy here. Are you?"

"I am comfortable."

"Hum! Well, I'll tell you what I have done. I have found a nice horse for you, well bred, well broken, gentle-

Barbara : Lady's Maid and Peeress

spirited, a bright bay with black points. I told the owner to bring him up to-morrow. Won't you say thank you?"

"Oh, yes. I do thank you, for it is very good of you to take that trouble."

"I don't deserve any thanks. I acted from selfish motives. Have you anything in the shape of a habit?"

"I have a linsey-woolsey skirt."

"Great powers!" exclaimed Vivian, with such serious horror that Constance laughed a frank, girlish laugh.

"Thank God!" cried her companion, "you can laugh. I began to fear that you had forsworn laughter and lightness."

Constance shook her head, but grew grave at once. Vivian looked up in her face, which from his position he could see well, and she met his eyes with a steadfast, wistful gaze, as though she could tell him a great deal.

"Chaldecott is coming to-morrow," he said, abruptly. "I am not easy about Tom. His valet tells me he coughed all night and seemed hardly able to breathe."

"I am so glad Dr. Chaldecott is coming!" exclaimed Constance, with animation.

"So am I, especially if it pleases you. Why, may I ask, is Chaldecott preferred before me? I am quite sure you would never cry aloud with joy if you heard *I* was coming."

Constance did not answer immediately. She looked at him thoughtfully, and then said softly, deliberately, "No, I do not think I should."

"That is too bad," returned Vivian, smiling good-humouredly. "You are an appalling young lady. But you have not told me why you prefer Chaldecott to my unworthy self."

Barbara: Lady's Maid and Peeress

"The reason why I cannot tell. Dr. Chaldecott is always sympathetic to me."

"And I have been a brute."

"No. I never thought that. But it amused you to tease me, and I was a fool to heed you. We shall be better friends in future. You can never hurt me again."

"How is that? Some strong mental change has passed over you, Constance."

"I have grown older and wiser, I suppose."

"And did I really wound you, my dear child? I am infinitely repentant. Will you not forgive, and graciously give me your hand to kiss?" He rose from the rug as he spoke to one knee, and took her hand in a strong but gentle grasp, kissing it more than once.

"We are to be close friends, then, and you will give me *your* sympathy?"

"Yes, if it chooses to go to you. I cannot force it."

"But if it will not come, we can have no reciprocity."

"Then we must do without it."

"How did you achieve this exalted state of indifference?"

"I cannot tell. I only wish it would go away. It is not a pleasant companion."

Vivian threw himself again at her feet, and a brief silence ensued.

"Have you been out to-day, Constance?"

"Yes. I went with Tom through the west wood. It was almost fine when we set out, but it came on a drizzling rain, and I fear the poor boy's cough will not be the better of it."

"And *you* will not be the better for having that unfortunate

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idiot thrown so much on your hands. It is enough to bring on melancholia. I will not allow it in future."

"He is only here three months of the year, and it would be selfish of me not to do what I can for him."

"It is a great mistake to be too unselfish," said Vivian, who had risen to take a turn to and fro, and then drawing a chair opposite her.

Before Constance could reply, Lady Glengarvon put her head into the room and cried,—

"Constance, I want you to copy a couple of letters for me."

Constance rose immediately, and Vivian went with her to the door. "I shall consider that we are allies from henceforth," he said. "However profound your indifference, I shall win your sympathy yet,—I must. I misunderstood you. I left a petulant child, and I find a charming, puzzling woman."

"Such a speech deserves favourable consideration," said Constance, smiling on him with her eyes. "Let us see how we shall get on."

"She is infernally indifferent," thought Vivian, as he closed the door upon her. "But, as she says, 'We'll see.'"

The next day was brighter and warmer, as if to welcome Dr. Chaldecott.

The trains by which the rare visitors to Glengarvon reached Rockborough arrived at one-thirty and five-thirty. The former necessitated a very early start from town and was rarely used. But Chaldecott, though not usually matutinal in his habits, had chosen the first train, and Vivian went to meet and drive him back from the station.

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Constance had gone with her aunt to visit some labourers at a distance, among whose cottages a fire had broken out, and Lady Glengarvon was anxious to ascertain their losses herself, and also to see how best to relieve them cheaply and effectively.

Vivian and his ally therefore had a long and private talk together when Chaldecott had visited and examined his charge, who welcomed him almost as effusively as he had Vivian.

"The fact is," said the doctor, at the end of more than an hour's close conversation, "the poor young fellow is in a bad way. Of course, it is our bounden duty to keep him alive as long as possible, and above all to save him from suffering as much as we can. Now I am disposed to take him south, to Torquay or Bournemouth; even in early August there is an edge to the wind in these northern regions, and his lungs are in a very bad state. Who is your chief medico in these parts?" asked Chaldecott.

"I believe a Dr. Barnes; but I am not sure. No one is ever ill at Glengarvon. They have a patent arrangement of steel springs and caoutchouc warranted never to go out of order, instead of the usual supply of nerves and tissues. It would by no means be a bad place to give the local sawbones a few fees, and to be deeply influenced by the advice *you* must suggest to him. I want to contest Rockborough one of these days, and one cannot begin to sow the seed too soon. You are looking rather down on your luck, Chaldecott. What's the matter? Is your father-in-law-elect unfriendly or your bride-elect irresponsible?"

"No. All goes well in that quarter. In fact, my future

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father-in-law is highly pleased with my prospects, and I am to be married next week. I want to make that secure before we go any further."

"Then you are really, actually in love?"

Chaldecott laughed. "I don't think there is any mistake about it."

"I have had a few adventures in my life; fire among the thorns, a flare, a crackle, and then blackness. It is a matter of temperament, I am certain. You are a sort of fellow that would always like to find the same woman sitting by your fire-side, and the more you saw of her the fonder you'd grow. Now, I'm afraid I'd get sick of the same face and figure, even if it were lovely, and I'd behave like a brute."

"A bad lookout for Miss Morton if the baroness carries out her intention of making a match between you, and she generally does do what she threatens."

Vivian did not speak for a minute. Then he said, more to himself than to his companion, "She is greatly changed."

"Who? Lady Glengarvon?"

"No; Constance. She's woke up; she has risen to a sudden sense of her own value, and she is developing into a curiously independent personage. I wonder what has happened to her."

"Fallen in love with some neighbouring young squire. Nothing matures a girl so swiftly as a touch of the tender passion."

"A neighbouring squire! By Heaven! I'll cut him out. But who the deuce can it be? There's Standish. He is a muff given up to drainage and labourers' cottages, and that scamp Archie Torrens, Lord Elmslie's second son, and——

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oh, no ! Just think of the guy she was. No man would have looked at her. Then the baroness never goes anywhere or asks a soul inside her doors. No ! that is impossible ; still, she is improved. Of course, if things go right I may not want her dowry, but it might be a help."

"I always thought there was a great amount of undeveloped character in Miss Morton," said Chaldecott.

"You judged her more justly because no match-making aunt made her a bugbear. But if you think of consulting old Barnes, had you not better write and ask him to call?"

"Not till to-morrow at least."

"Well, you know best. And have you found a suitable old woman?"

"I think I have, and it was no easy task. She is not old ; she is a strong, capable woman, about forty-five, a widow, and quite alive to the value of money ; she will not be a cheap article."

"If the poor boy is comfortable, I don't mind much what his comfort costs. Now come along out. I have had an awful time here. Nothing short of the strongest motives would have enabled me to endure it. By the way, how is the money holding out?"

"Not holding out at all. I have only about fifty pounds left."

"The deuce you haven't ! Then the baroness must shell out. It will require a surgical operation, but I did it once, and I will do it again. It is positively pathetic to see how she clings to her cash. However, I hope not to trouble her ladyship again, and really I am working in her interest as well

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as my own. Come along, we have time for a trudge over the moor before dinner."

Barbara's kind heart rejoiced to find that her young lady took an interest in trying on and wearing a second dress which she had finished for her the previous afternoon. It was, indeed, no small undertaking to regulate and renovate Miss Morton's wardrobe, as the young lady was in need of everything, and Barbara could scarcely spare time to accompany her mistress in the long rambles of which she was so fond. Add to this the battle with Lady Glengarvon over every article in excess of the very limited margin she had herself mapped out as sufficient for her niece's outfit, and it will be seen that Barbara's was no easy task. She stuck to it, however, gallantly, having conceived a sudden and most sincere attachment to Constance, whose character and circumstances gave the first gleam of romance to her hitherto extremely prosaic life.

Her sympathies were on Vivian's side. So far as the love part of Constance Morton's story was concerned, she thought it would be a shame if her young lady were not in due course to reign in her aunt's place, and the only way in which that could be accomplished was to marry Vivian.

As soon as Chaldecott had greeted Constance, he, too, perceived the change of which Vivian had spoken. First, she was fairly well dressed ; next, her figure had developed and promised to be rounded and graceful, while there was a look of thought in her eyes, a composure, almost dignity, in her bearing that told she had left the semi-childishness of early girlhood behind.

The baroness greeted him with careless civility. She was

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indifferent to most people, unless indeed they were connected with herself and her idolized estate, while Constance welcomed him with a warmth which indicated real personal liking.

"Is it permitted to say that I think you have grown taller since my visit here twelve months ago?" he began, taking a seat beside her on a sofa in the funereal drawing-room.

"It is, indeed. I want to be tall. I cannot support insignificance."

"Yet small women have done great things."

"Have they? I do not know; but then I know so little. You must tell me all about these important little women."

Chaldecott went on to enquire for the dogs, the pony, and sundry other pets, which carried them on till dinner was announced. Vivian occasionally glancing at his friend and employé with a half-amused look.

At table Vivian mentioned his wish that the chief doctor of Rockingham should be called in to consult with their ward's resident physician. The baroness highly approved, and it was agreed that a note should be sent that evening requesting Dr. Barnes to make an appointment, if possible, for the following day.

The conversation turned upon Tom Vivian, his health, the bad condition of his lungs, and the evident deterioration of his strength, and the small amount of intelligence he had shown during his last visit.

"And he is so easily terrified," added Constance, breaking silence for the first time since they sat down to dinner. "Last year he would not have been frightened if old Cedric, the Musgraves' dog, had stood and merely looked at him. What a wretched life!"

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"Certainly not worth living!" cried Vivian. When after dinner they strolled out on a broad raised walk under the drawing-room windows, Vivian attached himself to Constance.

"You are glad to have your chum here again?"

"My chum?"

"Yes,—Chaldecott."

"Yes, very glad; but how ill and worn and troubled he looks!"

"What can you expect? He is going to be married!"

"Then he ought to look bright and happy, unless, indeed, he is obliged to marry some one he does not like. That must be terrible."

"Too terrible for you ever to undertake?"

"Yes; most certainly!"

"Well, it is a good deal worse for a woman than a man."

"Why?" asked Constance, opening her large eyes.

"Ah! that would be telling the secrets of the prison-house."

"You turn aside everything. Are you ever in earnest?"

"Yes, desperately in earnest sometimes. I am now."

"About what?"

"I may tell you some day, if you care enough about me to ask."

"Very well. But I never indulge idle curiosity."

"I do not suppose you ever feel it. By the bye, Constance, I am sorry there's something gone wrong about that horse I wanted you to try; they can't send him up to-day. Then I shall be a good deal engaged."

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"It does not matter, Mr. Vivian. I cannot ride with you until I have a proper habit."

"Well, later you shall have that and many things, but you must call me Rex."

"Oh, if you really wish it I will, Rex."

"Thanks ! You can be very sweet if you choose."

* * * * *

The local Esculapius made an early appointment, and after examining the patient had a long discussion with Dr. Chaldecott and the sufferer's guardian. He took a gloomier view of matters than either of those most interested. He strongly recommended that young Vivian should be taken away south, to Torquay or Bournemouth, he should prefer the latter, and perhaps to the Riviera for the winter.

Whereupon Vivian declared that if in a few days his nephew did not show a decided improvement he should have an opinion from Sir James Philpott, the great authority on diseases of the chest. Of this intention Dr. Barnes highly approved, and the trio separated mutually well pleased. "Gad, sir !" said the doctor to Lawyer Morris, whom he met in the market-place on his return from Glengarvon, "it's uncommonly satisfactory to deal with gentlemen, well-informed men of the world ! The care and thought Mr. Vivian shows for that unfortunate boy does him the greatest credit ! The doctor, too, is a very intelligent fellow. He was much struck with some of my suggestions. Ah ! we know a thing or two in the north !"

Once Vivian came to a decision about his line of action he lost no time.

On the following Monday morning Tom, Vivian, and suite

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left Glengarvon, Chaldecott having gone off a day or two previously to select rooms in the hotel and make arrangements for his patient's comfort.

Marks, the valet, accompanied them part of the way, as he had secured a good engagement through Vivian's recommendation, and was to strike off at a midland station to enter on his new service.

Lady Glengarvon and Constance, with Mrs. Wylie, Barbara, and the ancient butler in the background, stood on the steps to see them off.

The idiot boy was trembling and excited by the prospect of the journey. At the last he was eager to take Constance too, and screamed with annoyance when she would not come. At last he was fairly pacified, and they drove away. "I am so glad they are going to find a nice elderly motherly woman to be with him," said Constance to her aunt, looking after the vanishing carriage. "Did you observe how he shrank from Marks and clung to Rex Vivian. Ordinary men are too harsh to deal with such an afflicted creature as Tom. Certainly, I am always touched with Mr. Vivian's tenderness to him."

"Yes. But you must remember that Rex is not with him morning, noon, and night. Men are very selfish and unscrupulous."

"Not all, I hope," said Constance.

"Most of them, then," replied her aunt, as she turned and re-entered the house.

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CHAPTER VIII.

"BARBARA'S ACCOUNT."

THOUGH it was a dull, quiet time after Mr. Vivian, the doctor, and the poor young gentleman left, I remember it well, better than Miss Constance can, perhaps because my own affairs interested me more just then.

The biggest man about the place, after old Mr. Clough, the butler, was James Macpherson, the head gardener. He was a favourite with her ladyship. He made more of the fruit and vegetables than any other gardener ever did, and he would not work for nothing. They do say he got so much per cent. on the monthly profits beside his salary. He was a great hand at making a bargain, and my lady thought no end of him.

About this time he came into the house a good bit, for he and Lady Glengarvon were planning to send the grapes and peaches to the London market, and he was fighting the railway people about the rates of carriage.

I was often in her ladyship's study then, battling about Miss Morton's clothes. I never could get the dear young lady to speak up for herself. "No, Barbara," she used to say, "I am merely a pensioner on my aunt's bounty; but for her I might have been brought up in the workhouse. I have no right to put her to unnecessary expense."

"Law, miss," I used to say, "what do I ask for but bare necessities?"

Anyhow, I worked and worked till I got them. At this

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time, then, I ran up against Macpherson pretty often; and one day, as he was coming out and I was going into the study, he said, "You never come into the gardens, mem. I can tell you, they are worth looking at just now. You come one evening. I am often there till after seven, and I'll give you a posy for yourself, and maybe a plum."

I thanked him, and in a day or two I did go, and brought back some sweet flowers to Miss Constance. Then, if I didn't go often, he would send me flowers by the under housemaid, and it was all very nice and pleasant. However, it is not my own story I am writing, so I shall say no more about myself at present.

All this time Miss Morton never mentioned young Musgrave's name, or alluded to him in any way. She was very quiet and rather silent, but she kept very busy about all sorts of things. She got a botany book out of the library, and gathered plants and ferns and what flowers she could find, and pasted them in a book. She played on the piano, sometimes hours at a time, and she often wanted to go out with the baroness, but my lady would not have her, except now and then. She did not seem to care much about anything. Sewing was what seemed to amuse her most, and she grew to sew most beautifully. She did not like to go out without me, and I noticed that a week never passed that she did not go up on the moor to the cairn where we had met young Mr. Musgrave. There she used to sit and strain her eyes towards the glimpse of sea in the west, and after a bit stand up and start talking about clothes and lace and things I knew she didn't care a straw for.

All this time letters came two or three times a week from

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the doctor or Mr. Vivian. It seemed that Master Tom bore the journey very well, but got worse after a bit. They had a great doctor from London, who said the only chance for him was to go away to the south of Europe as soon as they could strengthen him up a bit.

Then came a letter saying they were to start the next day but one, and rest a bit in Paris, where the British embassy doctor was to look after the young gentleman. Next came a few lines saying that they were at Meurice's Hotel, and that the doctor there did not think quite so badly of the case as the great man in London, who had written a long letter about it to the British embassy doctor. Finally, after a pause, came a letter with deep black edges. The poor fellow had broken a blood-vessel in a bad fit of coughing and passed away without a struggle.

Every one expected such an ending, but there was a great hush throughout the place. The baroness was writing letters all day, and had Miss Constance with her to copy and address many of them.

I had no chance of seeing her till she came up rather early to bed.

"Oh, Barbara, it has been such a strange day! It makes me sad to think that there was not, could not be a soul to regret that poor boy. Why are such imperfect creatures sent on earth to be an affliction to themselves and others?"

"God knows, miss! But there always have been and there always will be such."

"My aunt is very solemn about it; but I can see she is greatly relieved. How pleased Rex Vivian must be! Barbara, I am more afraid of him than ever. I knew he would put poor

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Tom to death by sheer force of will. I am young and strong and healthy, yet I believe he could put an end to me, too. "

"Why, Miss Constance, it's not like a clever young lady, who has read no end of books as you have, to believe in witchcraft and the like of that. At any rate, Mr. Vivian would never hurt *you*. Every one says he is so fond of you."

Constance laughed. "He is exceedingly fond of himself, Barbara."

"How do you know that, miss?"

"A long course of observation. Oh, how delighted Rex Vivian must be to have all that poor boy's wealth all his own, free from the trustees and such restraints! My aunt says they have managed so well that the property is now nearly thirty thousand a year."

I could not help exclaiming, "Good Lord!"

"Yes," said my young lady, looking at me with a pleasant half smile. "I suppose it is a great lot of money, but I know so little about the meaning of big sums that three or thirty thousand pounds do not seem so different to me. As to what they would buy, of course I know that thirty is ten times three."

"Well, Miss Constance, if you had thirty thousand a year you might have a dozen or more horses in your stables, and buy jewels, books, pictures, spend a hundred and fifty pounds a year or more on your dress, and—and——" Then a thought struck me, and I exclaimed, "Oh, dear! we must see about mourning. There's no time to be lost. I suppose, miss, you'll follow?"

"Follow?—follow what, Barbara?"

"The funeral, to be sure, 'm."

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"I don't quite know." Then she told me there was a dispute between my lady and Mr. Vivian about the place where the poor young gentleman was to be buried, at Glengarvon or at the Vivians' burying-place,—to lie with his father's people, as Mr. Vivian said.

"And he will have his way, you may be sure," added my dear young lady.

I had made up my mind to go and speak to my lady the next morning, though I didn't like it a bit; but I would have faced more than that for Miss Constance, when, to my relief, while we were speaking, came Mrs. Wylie with a message,—Lady Glengarvon wished to speak to me in her bedroom.

It was, as I guessed, about the mourning. It was a consultation and a half. An hour and more we turned out drawers and opened wardrobes. And what a collection she had! Some lovely old lace and antique brocades, I must admit,—the very things for fancy or court dress,—but for the rest there were the remnants—it would not be respectful to say rags—of every garment she ever wore. Not that I'd quarrel with her for keeping them all, for they would be little good to any one.

First she wanted me to put two and a half yards of crape on an old black satin that limp and thin and glazed—on top of the natural satin sheen—that I felt it my duty to refuse.

"I'd be wanting in respect to your ladyship," I said, very solemn, "if I let you wear such a thing. These small matters are likely enough beneath your notice, but they are my business, and I'm bound to say that satin ain't mourning at all. Why, you might as well put crape on colour, spe-

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cially for a near relation. No, my lady, you must have a black merino, with a deep crape border, cuffs and collar and body trimming to match, and for a dinner dress——”

“I shall not want a dinner dress,” she broke in. “Do you think I should give dinners or go to dinners at such a time?”

“Of course your ladyship knows best; but we must give the same to Miss Constance.”

Well, we argued for an hour and more, and in the end I did manage to get what was absolutely necessary; then I said, “Of course, if your ladyship goes to the funeral——”

“No, I shall not,” she interrupted, sharply. “The late Mr. Thomas Vivian will be buried in the Vivian vault away in the south of England.”

She said it quite cheerfully. Indeed, I never knew her so gracious. There could be no mistake about it, she *was* glad that poor idiot boy was gone.

As to sending her measurements and my young lady's to a first-rate London house with a proper order, she first screamed out at the idea, so I had to go to and fro to Rockingham and direct part of the work, which was to be done by a poor, ignorant, well-meaning creature, who called herself a dress-maker, till I was regularly worn out.

Generally, I had some kind of a conveyance, sometimes the donkey-chaise poor Master Tom Vivian used, but now and again I had to walk, which was a sad loss of time. I remember well old Mr. Morris, my lady's lawyer, overtaking me at “The Glengarvon Arms,”—a big old inn where the coaches used to change horses in the old coaching days. He was driving himself in a queer sort of a trap they used to call

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a buggy in those days. He pulled up beside me, and called out, "Hey, my lass! You are Miss Morton's maid, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," said I, smiling, for the old man always looked kindly at me whenever we met.

"Jump up alongside o' me," he said; "I'll give you a lift." He took his reins and whip in one hand and stretched out the other to help me in.

"Thank you, sir," said I, right glad of the rest, and his big raw-boned horse went on "trit-trot."

My old gentleman was quite silent for a bit, and then he said, with a kind of chuckle, "So you are Barbara West, are you?"

"Yes, sir. Maybe you have known somebody of my name?"

"Maybe I have. It's not such an uncommon name, hey?"

"No, it is not."

"Come now, my lass, how do you fare in yon auld Tower among the mists and the moors?"

"Very well, sir, indeed. I have all I want, and a sweet, young lady, who treats me like a friend."

"Oh! ah!" and he laughed. "Who tells you all her secrets, eh? I'll be bound ye know more than most of the Glengarvon politics. Is your young mistress going to take the husband her ladyship has provided for her?"

"I am not so sure I know who you mean."

He gave me a dig in the side with his elbow.

"Oh, don't you? Why, the Honourable Rex Vivian, to be sure."

"Is he an honourable, sir?"

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"To be sure ; they, he and his kind, are all honourable men." He laughed, a queer bitter little laugh, and went on asking all the questions imaginable, sometimes about my work, the church, the rector, Dr. Chaldecott, and if he and Miss Morton were friends, if Miss Morton and her ladyship were good friends, about the dogs, the gardener, and I don't know what all, but always coming back to Miss Constance and Mr. Vivian, till I found I had told him everything I knew and a good deal of what I suspected.

Then he said what a fine, princely-looking man Mr. Vivian was, and what a good thing it was that his poor idiot nephew had been taken out of the way. Every now and then he poked my side with his elbow. "I don't doubt but your young mistress will be ever so fond of him, so tell her, my lass, she ought to be thankful to have an aunt who can buy so smart a husband for her.

"Rex Vivian knows his own value, and will never offer his hand to a woman who has nothing in hers. There now ! I have put myself in yours. You could get me into hot water if you repeat what I've said. But you are a wiselike lassie and I do not think you will. So not a word of this to Miss Morton or my lady." He put his snuffy finger on his lip and gave me an appalling wink.

He is a disagreeable, cantankerous, prying old sinner, I can see, and has some grudge against Mr. Vivian. Miss Constance doesn't like him too well either, but he is taken with her. I can see that, too. Mr. Vivian is just the husband for her. Young Musgrave is quite out of the question, thought I to myself, when I had got out of the trap by the Glengarvon gate and thanked him for the lift.

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Then I walked on quick, thinking [what would be the best thing to do. For though I did like Mr. Vivian, he was so free spoken and pleasant, there was a kind of hardness about him at times if he were vexed that made me doubt if he were all sugar. I know Marks, poor Master Tom's man, who gave himself airs and ordered people about, would fly at his lightest word; yes, Marks was afraid of him, certainly. Perhaps it might be as well to give Miss Constance a hint that Mr. Vivian was looking out for her money. She deserved a prince, that she did, but I was not so sure that he was the right kind of—

It was rather a trying time altogether, but not so bad after all. Mr. Macpherson used to be coming my way now and again,—Mr. Morris, too, gave me more than one lift. That old man surprised me considerably. He was so civil, not to say sweet, and somehow, though he was ugly and snuffy and spiteful, I could not exactly dislike him, for he seemed to like me. The last time he drove me up the long hill from Rockborough to Glengarvon he surprised me more than ever. As we drew near the place where I usually got out he spoke out suddenly, for he had been silent for a while.

“You are getting well on, my lass, hey?”

“Yes, sir; if I always am as well and happy I shall have no cause to complain of life.”

“You have but poor pay, though. I know that. I know every *fardin'* that's spent in my lady's house, and you'll want to lay by something for your old age; whether ye marry or no, you ought to have a fair wage.”

“That's my own matter, sir. I am always free to seek a more remunerative service.” I thought I should stop his

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talk with such a beautiful big word, and it seemed to for a bit, but I really don't think he heard me, for he soon went on, "Twenty pun' ain't much to buy you a bit dress and put away a few shillings every month. Look here, Barbara, if you get into a difficulty, come along to me. I'll stick to you, my lass. You'll think me an old fool bodie, but your father did me a service once. Nothing very remarkable, but I don't forget, and ye needn't mention it."

"My father, sir!" I cried, fairly dazed.

"Yes, yes; away in London. I got into a difficulty in a crowd and he helped me. He is a stout, strong man, and he gave me his name. I have it written down. Joseph West, Caretaker, 14 Mincing Lane, hey?"

"Yes, sir, that's him. How did you come to know I was his daughter?"

"I found out, my lass. I found out."

This seemed the most astonishing thing I had ever heard of. But I hadn't much time to think about it, I was so worried and overworked with the mourning and the mistakes of that unfortunate Mrs. Hodge. I just thought the old lawyer was a little off his head, and put it out of my mind.

Time slipped by wonderfully fast, and we read of poor Master Tom Vivian's funeral down in Devonshire. There was an account of it in *The Rockborough Courant*, with thick black lines between the columns. Still, Mr. Vivian didn't come. He was so busy with lawyers and agents and we didn't know what.

But he did appear at last, about the middle of October, rather unexpectedly. I was glad my dear lady's dinner-dress was ready, and she did look slim and elegant and willowy in

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it, for she had grown pale and thin, and her eyes looked almost too large.

Well, Mr. Vivian came with a valet that looked like a duke, and his groom came after, with two horses, such beauties, and a couple of dogs, and guns, and I don't know what all. They seemed to take possession of the whole place. I don't think the baroness liked it.

Miss Morton came up to her room much later than usual, with quite a colour and an uneasy look in her face. She had some little boxes or cases in her hands.

"Oh, Barbara," she said, "you never saw any one so pleased as Rex Vivian is! He is extremely quiet, of course, but one can see that he has his heart's desire, that he has, or thinks he has, the world at his feet. Look what he has brought me."

She held out her hand, and on the third finger of the left hand were two splendid rings,—one diamond, the other diamond and ruby. Then she opened the cases. They held a watch, enamelled in dark blue, with some classic design, and a lovely little chain of gold and blue. In the second was the sweetest necklet I ever beheld,—sort of stars of such brilliant diamonds, with opal hearts, not big or heavy, but what a fairy queen might wear, and a crescent for a pendant, all diamonds.

I could not help screaming out with admiration and delight, to think that Miss Constance should have these beauties.

"Yes, they are lovely. Let me put the necklet on you, Barbara. How brilliant it is! When he gave them to me, Rex said, 'Consider that poor Tom has given you these; they were all his mother's. Had the poor fellow been capable of making a will, he would have left you these in memory of your great kindness to him. I feel bound to carry out the

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wishes he ought to have had.' I am sure I said something very stupid, I was so overwhelmed ; but Rex put on the rings and kissed my hand. Aunt Elizabeth was astonished, and said she would keep them for me. But Rex said, 'No ; I give them to Constance, to have and to hold. You take them and keep them yourself.' "

"Well, I'm sure, miss, they are a splendid present. Why, that necklet will be the very thing to wear when you are presented."

"You are still determined I am to be presented, Barbara," said Miss Constance, holding up the necklet in her hand and bending it to and fro in the light.

"What pleasure the beauty of these stones gives me ! I love to look at them, and these rings. I really believe I am an utter worldling by nature, fit for bales and rents, the play, the race-course, and—oh, I do not even know the names of the endless amusements Rex talks of ! I long to see the world, and yet I love this fine, grim, breezy old place."

"Of course, Miss Constance, you would like to have the life and amusements other young ladies have, and you will get them, I am sure. Mr. Vivian will be a good friend to you, and more. Is he going to stay any time ?"

"Not very long ; he seems to have quantities to do, especially in London. He says I must have a habit, and you are to measure me carefully, and he will send the measurements to a tailor." Then she said, "I don't want Rex Vivian to pay for anything for me ; so you must not measure me until I can settle it all with Aunt Elizabeth. Now I am quite tired, and my face burns, so I will get to bed. Leave the window open, Barbara. I feel feverish. Listen. The Musgraves'

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dogs are baying or barking. I wonder what disturbs them."

She went to the window and leant out a bit. When she stepped back into the light I could see the glitter of tears upon her cheek.

The next morning was finer than any we had had for some time. There was a fresh crisp feel in the air, and the trees were touched with all kinds of tints,—brown and gold and red and yellow. Miss Constance was up early, and after luncheon my lady and Mr. Vivian drove to Rockborough together.

Presently Miss Constance and I went off to see the wife of a shepherd away over the moor. She had a poor little sick child, and we often took her jelly and nice things to tempt the little one to eat.

It was a long way, but neither of us were tired, and my young lady, who looked well in her simple black morning dress, which I will say fitted her like a glove, and would have done honour to any house in the trade, said, "Don't let us go in. It is a pity to lose this lovely evening. Let us walk through the west wood, and, Barbara, I will go and see Mrs. Musgrave. She is at home again. I saw her in church on Sunday. She looked very ill, and was crying great part of the service. I longed to go over to kiss and comfort her. She will see me, I am sure. You shall sit in the garden near the old sun-dial, for I must see her alone."

"Yes, Miss Constance, of course. But, do excuse me, wouldn't her ladyship be displeased if she knew——"

"No, not at all," interrupted my young lady; "she has no right to be displeased. She would not care so long as I kept

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out of the way and did not cost her money. She has no idea—that—that — Oh, I should die if she ever knew !” And the colour flamed up over her cheeks and made her eyes brighter than the diamonds on her hand.

When Miss Constance flushed up in that way she was quite beautiful. She could bear a great deal of colour both in dress and complexion, though in a general way she had very little. It came and went very suddenly and changed her greatly, so that one never tired of her face, which varied from moment to moment. “How long is it since we met Alan Musgrave on the moor?” she said, abruptly.

“Over two months, I think, 'm.”

“How long it seems, and how long the future will be ! for we must never meet again. I shall hate myself if I forget, yet remembering makes me so miserable.”

She had hardly uttered the words when a man came round a turn in the path,—we had got well into the wood by that time,—a tall, slight young man in a dark green uniform with black braid in a pattern over it, and a small, round green cap with a peak to it. He looked smart and graceful, and I soon saw it was the same Alan Musgrave I had seen before. Miss Constance gave a little cry and stood quite still. Young Musgrave sprang forward, taking off his cap at the same time and throwing it on the grass.

“Forgive me for intruding on you again ; I only wanted one more word,—one more glance !” he exclaimed, catching her hand in both his own. “The regiment sails for India next week, and I have three days' leave to bid my friends good-bye. You'll bid me God-speed, will you not ? my love, my life ! I'll never cross your path again. Oh, Constance !

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you are changed even in these two months. You are more womanly, sweeter, fairer." She did not seem to hear his words.

"Going—going to India," she repeated; "that is parting indeed. Shall I never see you, Alan dear, again? It is too hard, too cruel, for you. You need not lose your mother, every one, because—because I unfortunately crossed your path."

"It is bitter, but better anything than hanging round here catching glimpses of an unattainable heaven. I dare not hope. You must not think of me." Then they spoke very low and earnestly, and I kept back and did not try to hear, no, not one bit. At last Musgrave said more clearly, in a hoarse sort of tone, "I dare not stay any longer, and to-morrow I leave the old home. Constance, if I were on my death-bed you would give me a farewell kiss. This parting is as the hand of death separating us. Give me one kiss, Constance,—the very last."

He had not to ask twice; her arms were round his neck, and his straining her to him, their lips clinging together in a long kiss, when a step beside me made me turn, and turn to stone into the bargain, when I saw Mr. Vivian looking at them for a moment in speechless surprise; then a fiery look of revengeful scorn and fury lit up his wicked black eyes.

"Dog! How dare you touch that lady!" he exclaimed, in a harsh voice full of contemptuous command.

"Hound!" was the quick answer, "I am far fitter to touch her than you are." And Musgrave stood clear from Miss Constance, but between her and Mr. Vivian.

"You must account to me for this."

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"Who are you that ask? Yet I will so far explain: Miss Morton and myself are old playfellows and comrades in spite of the difference between us socially. To-morrow I leave Glengarvon, and to-morrow week I leave England, both in all probability forever. Out of her kindly tender nature Miss Morton was condescending enough to give me a parting kiss."

"Because," said my dear truthful young mistress, with a sort of sob in her voice,—“because I love him dearly and will never see him again! Good-bye, Alan. God keep you! God be with you!” She turned away and fled up through the trees towards home.

Mr. Vivian looked after her and then at young Musgrave, who, collecting himself, picked up his cap and put it on with a defiant air. “I think, sir, you have now had all the information you can require, and I wish you a very good-evening.”

“Rather good for a last scene in a rustic comedy,” said Vivian, with a very disagreeable, bitter kind of laugh. “You carry off the honours of war, young man, for the moment. Make the most of your remembrance; the triumph can never be repeated.”

“I know that well,” returned the other, and, pressing down his cap, he walked briskly off in the direction of his father's farm.

“Pray what keeps *you* here?” asked Mr. Vivian, suddenly turning on me. “Your business is with your mistress.”

“I am about her business now, sir,” said I, coolly. “I wish to be able to tell her that you and the other gentleman had parted and gone in different directions.”

“Oh! the devil you do! Here, tell me,”—and he held

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out a sovereign or half a sovereign,—“was this the first or fifty-first meeting?”

“Wouldn't think of taking your money, sir, when I have nothing of value to give in exchange.”

“You are a damned impertinent baggage, but you have your wits about you. Go; tell Miss Morton that I am not going to thrash her agricultural favourite *this* time.”

“Thank you, sir,” said I; “she *will* be pleased, for, you see, two might play at that game.”

Then a new aspect of the scene seemed to strike him, and he laughed aloud. The sound of his laughter reached me for a minute or so after I left him, though I walked fast.

CHAPTER IX.

VIVIAN went slowly back, thinking in a tangled way of the scene he had just witnessed. He was furious, he was disgusted, he was mortified. Here was this delicate wild flower of a girl, so cold, so proud, so reserved, that he was beginning to think any little token of friendliness from her something to work for and rejoice over, hugging and kissing a common soldier, the son of one of her aunt's farmers; “and a deuced good-looking young fellow he is,” confessed Vivian to himself. “By Jove! she did cling to him! every curve and line of her figure showed abandonment to his caresses,—that cold, dreamy, unformed school-girl! What incomprehensible humbugs women are! Still, I think I have the best of the game on the whole. First, I have a tolerable idea as to the stuff she is made of; next, her secret is mine. I'd like to see

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the baroness's face if I told her. Nothing like a secret in common for creating a bond of union. Then young Musgrave will be safe out of the way for ten years, and ten years, ay, or three, mean, in a love-affair, eternity. I wonder how long it has lasted and how far it has gone? Again, if she has grown accustomed to a lover, she'll want another, and I am at hand. But I am free, and her fortune or no fortune is of no moment. Heaven rest your soul, Tom! if you have or had a soul. You could not have gone out of my way at a more appropriate moment. Yes, I hold very good cards, and my visits to this grim old dungeon will be much livelier in future, and, my sweet Constance, you shall know what a strong grip I have of you. But I shall not make a fool of myself about the young lady; the tables are turned. God! what a kiss that fellow had! Not the first, either! Well, I'll never have the first, so I must make the best of it. I wonder if she'll show up this evening. Probably not. She shall see me to-morrow, though. By all that's irritating, I suppose she had my rings on the hand that clasped the young farmer's neck, confound him! How history repeats itself. But I have not often played the part of the rich lover who gives all to the poor lover who gets all."

As Vivian anticipated, Constance did not appear at dinner. Lady Glengarvon seemed rather annoyed by her non-appearance, though her tokens of annoyance were few and slight. "It is very tiresome of Constance to have those headaches again. She has not complained of them for a long time. But she seemed really ill just now, when I went to see her."

"She is moped," said Vivian, after the servants had left the room. "You are a busy woman, my dear baroness, with more brain-power than generally falls to the lot of your sex."

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You can hardly understand how exceptionally dull your niece's life has been."

"Does it really affect her, Rex? She seems so still and cold. Why, even I had my girlish fancies and enjoyments, till I gave up everything personal to the absorbing desire to retrieve Glengarvon. It is doubly mine, for I have paid a high price for it."

"You certainly have," he returned. "You have done your work splendidly. Now you ought to rest and enjoy. You can afford it."

"Rest and enjoy," she repeated, with a grim smile. "My dear cousin, I do not know how to do either. But, Rex, as your stay must be short, I want to speak to you of Constance, as we are alone. I want you to understand that I should like to see her your wife, but I do not want to force her on you. The few thousand pounds I can give her are of no consequence to you now. I always thought that poor Tom would have lived many years, as imbeciles so often do. Then it might have suited you to marry her. As it is——" She paused.

"As it is, I am not in a hurry to put on the matrimonial fetters. Later on, my dear cousin, Constance and I may make a match of it. But, in the mean time, she ought to see something of the world. Let her go and stay this winter with Louisa, who will be delighted to have her. Louisa is clever, *mondé*, rather good-natured, and might be very useful. I see a good deal of promise in Constance Morton. She might make a very good marriage. I might marry her myself, though at present I don't stand particularly well with her."

"That does not matter much," said the baroness, calmly.

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"She will soon understand that she must marry *some* one. Why not you?" She paused, and her wide, thin-lipped mouth extended into a smile, which gave a queer, crookedly pathetic expression to her strong, harsh face. "Besides, she has never been away from me for sixteen years, except when she went to your sister after the measles. And, do you know, I should miss her greatly, terribly."

"Why don't you let her know she is of importance to you? She would soon be a very loving adopted daughter."

"You think so? Ah, no, Rex! She does not care a straw about me."

"And she does not think you care for her. It is a vicious circle. I wish you would listen to my suggestions respecting your niece, for she has rather taken my fancy, and I think it possible that hereafter I might wish to marry her. At present you must admit she has hardly had the upbringing of a gentlewoman."

"Don't say that, Rex. She is naturally——"

"Naturally she is *grande dame au bout des doigts*. Still, she needs training."

Before they parted that evening Rex Vivian had won his cousin's consent to many things she would have deemed impossible the day before. Constance was to be entrusted to the care of Mrs. Quentin for the winter and spring. A certain sum was to be expended on her dress. Maintenance and education and much was to be left to the independent judgment of Mrs. Quentin.

"You know," said Vivian, "Jack Quentin is only a clerk in the Foreign Office, and is as poor as a rat, so even if disposed they cannot be generous."

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So a bargain was arranged in terms by no means unfavourable to the baroness.

Meantime, Constance, little thinking that two individuals so little in sympathy with her were settling her future quite irrespective of her own likes and dislikes, was prostrate in the shelter of her own chamber, overwhelmed with despair and shame. That any eye should have seen her self-abandonment in that supreme moment of love and grief was bad enough, but when that eye was Rex Vivian's the humiliation was doubled and trebled. How Vivian would scoff and misunderstand her! And Alan! To Vivian nothing ever seemed sacred, and his scornful eyes mocked her even in the darkness which had crept over her as she cowered in a large old-fashioned chair, not liking even Barbara to come near her. Then the agony of feeling that Musgrave was gone, virtually forever, was a cruel stab. Her heart bled, too, to think that it was owing to her he was exiled from home and family and all that made life worth having.

How—how was she ever to meet Vivian again! And yet where could she fly? How helpless and friendless she was! Nor could she hide herself always in her room. At least for another day she could hide herself, and then——

"Is that you, Barbara?" she called, hearing a footstep in the next room.

"Yes, miss. May I come in?"

"Come; I thought you had gone down to supper."

"I did go, 'm, but I have come back again. I have a note for you, miss. Mr. Vivian's servant gave it to me."

"Oh no, Barbara! I don't want to touch it or look at it. It will only make me more miserable."

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"Maybe not, miss. I think Mr. Vivian wants to be kind; and you'll excuse me, Miss Constance, Mr. Vivian is not just the sort of man to make an enemy of."

"I don't care whether he is friend or enemy. I am too insignificant for any one to trouble about, except for one, of whom I must not think."

She opened the note slowly and reluctantly as she spoke. It contained but two or three lines: "I am obliged to return to town the day after to-morrow. I will not go without seeing you. Can you doubt my wish to serve you? Meet me in the old music-room to-morrow between eleven and twelve."

"He does not ask for an answer. You see he makes sure of me, and I had better go. Why does he want to see me? Is it a pleasure to torture me? But I had better go."

"Yes, indeed, dear Miss Constance. Why should you be so frightened of Mr. Vivian? I should never be surprised if he went on his bended knees some fine day and asked you to marry him."

Miserable as she was, Constance could not restrain a smile at this suggestion.

"That is a wild idea, Barbara. Why, Mr. Vivian looks on me as a half-tamed savage. It is only because of my close connection with Aunt Elizabeth that he does not wish me to be a disgrace to the family."

"Well, miss, we'll see," said Barbara, cheerfully.

The next morning was grey, drizzling, and chill, and the baroness did not go out. But in or out, she was sure to be absorbed in business till one o'clock; so having read his letters and skimmed the *Times*, Vivian repaired in a leisurely way to the music-room. It was an octagonal chamber in a corner of

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the patched old house, where an ancient spinnet, a lute, and one or two other bygone musical instruments reposed.

There was a modern music-room in the last addition to the mansion, and the old one was almost forgotten.

“What a dreary place it is in bad weather ! I don't wonder at that poor child taking what diversion she could find,” he thought, as he looked out on the driving mist and shrouded landscape. “She hit on a remarkably dangerous one, however. She is late, but she will come, for I have no doubt she is in a horrid fright lest I should tell her grim old aunt.” Here he ceased even to think, for a touch on the handle of the door caught his ear, then silence. “She is afraid to come in,” he thought, and a smile glittered in his deep-set eyes. “I'll open it for her.” But before he could reach the door it opened and Constance walked in a few steps, paused, and then with an effort raised her eyes to his. She was very white, but as they looked at each other the colour sprang to her throat, her cheeks, her brow, while she half turned from him with an infinitely graceful, natural gesture of deprecation that set Vivian's pulses throbbing, somewhat to his own surprise. He shut the door behind her carefully, and, taking both her hands in his, exclaimed, “If you change colour so fast, Constance, I shall run away. I never could manage a fainting woman.”

“There is no danger of my fainting,” she said, very low.

“Come and sit down. How cold your hands are !” And still holding them, he drew to a long settle by the empty fireplace and sat down beside her. He let her hands go at her first movement to withdraw them ; then leaning his elbow on

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the back of the couch, he looked steadily at her for a moment before he said, "So while I compassionated your dull, lonely, monotonous life, you had found amusement and occupation in the old thrilling game we all play at more or less. Why did you stoop to conquer so humble a victim? I flatter myself you had better material at hand if——"

"What do you mean?" she interrupted. "It was very hard to come here and meet you, but I did not think you would speak in this unkind and mocking tone."

"Forgive me, my sweet one, if I cannot treat your terrible escapade seriously, nor think of your girlish fancy for this young ploughman with exactly with respect. You have certainly led the life of a recluse, but instinct must tell you that it is never to a woman's credit to take a lover from a grade not one but many steps below her own."

"If you have only asked to see me to jeer and torture me, Mr. Vivian——"

"Well, I am a brute, and I beg your pardon, but it puts me in a blind fury to think—to think of many things that probably never cross your mind. I am your friend, and your secret is safe with me. Still, I shall always be watchful and jealous of you."

"Jealous," repeated Constance, lifting her head with a haughty movement.

"Yes, jealous. I grant I have no right to be; but I am, and will be, till you give me as long, as tender, as sweet a kiss as you bestowed on your soldier. Oh, you need not look so alarmed! I am an epicure in my way, and want nothing that is not willingly given. We are almost kinsfolk, Constance. Why are you so unfriendly? Come, let us speak

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reasonably. You are perfectly safe with me. I will never betray you, nor should I wish to distress your aunt. You must put this whole affair out of your head. It is a bit of folly any young thing like you might have been betrayed into. It is Lady Glengarvon's own fault for neglecting you as she did and leaving you to the inefficient care of an old French woman who was past her work. I shall never humiliate you by reminding you of this escapade."

"You do not humiliate me," she interrupted. "Let me speak. I want to explain, that never to my dying day shall I be ashamed of loving Alan Musgrave. He is as true a gentleman, Rex, as yourself; perhaps truer. But I deeply, bitterly regret that we loved each other, chiefly because it has been such a misfortune to him; and though he deserves to be loved, I know what is due to the society we live in. I ought never to marry him. I am not in some ways fit to be his wife. I am an ignorant, helpless girl, and it is well we are parted. I trust he will soon forget all about me and live happily, successfully. It was no one's fault, but every one's misfortune. I never remember the time I did not love Alan. But it came to me quite suddenly how hard it would be, how impossible, to live without him. Now I must learn to do so, and not to be weak or miserable, and I will try; believe me, I will. But you must not be unkind or ignoble, Rex. Do not mock at what you cannot understand, and oh! never, never speak to me of Alan more!"

"By Heaven, I will not!" cried Vivian, touched in spite of himself. "You are a curious girl and a bit of a witch. Of one thing rest assured, Musgrave will have almost forgotten your existence by the time he reaches India. You can't

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think how frightfully inconstant men are, especially when they have no hope."

While he spoke Constance had taken a parcel from her pocket. When he stopped, she said, "As you have told me so clearly that you do not respect me, I would rather give you back your gifts. They are all here, and I shall always be grateful for your kind——"

"No, Constance! I will have none of them. I am more eager to give these, and more, than I ever was. Not respect you! What can you mean? You have too much pluck not to be respected. If we are to be friends,—and you will be the better of my friendship,—do not attempt to return these trifles to me. Let us bury the past, not tearfully, but with the hope of many pleasant days together. The clouds are lifting. Go wrap yourself in your plaid and come around to the stables with me. You have never looked at my horses. I intend one for you. I shall be to and fro a good deal and I must have the means of getting about. You ought to attack your aunt for a habit. I'll bet what you like she will give in. Then I'll give you lessons."

"Thank you, Rex!"

"There! that is the one little friendly note I catch all through your talk,—you call me Rex."

"It came quite naturally to me."

Vivian opened the door and held it for her to pass through, then suddenly stopping the way, cried,—

"But, Constance. I say! Have you squared your maid?"

"What do you mean?"

"Does she understand that it is against her own interest to gossip about you?"

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"Oh, Barbara is perfectly safe ; safer than I am myself. She is so sensible and good."

"Hum ! don't be too sure. However, I'll see about that. Did she make that dress?"

"She did."

"Deuced neat. What wonders a first-rate milliner would do for you !"

Constance smiled. "I suppose I should not know myself."

"I should always know you. Here, let me put on those rings again. Why, Constance, your hand is a patent of nobility." He kissed it before he let her go.

"Don't look so startled. It is but a small favour to take. Go, look up your necklet and watch, and meet me in the hall. You are a bit of a puzzle to me, but I do not intend to puzzle over you more than I can help."

Constance was too much exhausted by the conflict she had gone through to answer or resist. She fetched her plaid, and went obediently with him to the stables, looking at the beauties he pointed out in the horses without seeing them.

"Come back to the house," exclaimed Vivian at last, noticing how pale and drooping she looked. "You are hardly able to stand. There is the luncheon-bell. Come along ; eat and drink, and then get the accomplished Barbara to tuck you up, and have a good sleep."

"You speak as if I were a baby."

"Oh, no ; it would be better for you if you were. Though I am not sure. You would have to go through it all some time or other."

Constance caught his meaning and flushed under his eyes, which always affected her in a way she did not understand.

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"How difficult it is to avoid a forbidden topic!" said Vivian, mercilessly, with what Constance thought a cruel laugh. "You must forgive me. I am going to be as good as gold, if I can."

"Try not to be cruel, Rex. I think you are naturally cruel."

"Do you? I am immensely affectionate, too, with a tinge of the other, perhaps; but no one knows himself, and remember the essential ingredient in love, friendship, good will. What you like of tenderness and devotion is reciprocity; so you must love me if you intend to make use of me, which I am sure you do."

"Make use of you, Mr. Vivian!" in great surprise.

"Nothing is to be done with Mr. Vivian, but a good deal with Rex."

"If you please, sir," said the old butler, advancing to meet them as they crossed the threshold of the chief entrance, "her ladyship would like to speak to you in the study."

"Very well. Is it not luncheon-time? Make Miss Mor-ton take a glass of wine or milk, or something, she is tired."

And he went quickly down the passage leading to that council-chamber, wishing Lady Glengarvon and her business at the devil.

The interview with Constance had set light to a fiery train which underlay all the better and wiser strata of his composition, the love of power, the strong passion which often slumbered, yet was ever liable to wake with cruel, irresistible force, though its first ignition was slow and its progress not easily perceived, till it reached a certain height, when it swept away all opposition; so Vivian turned his thoughts most reluctantly to matters of business.

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The baroness was in later years inclined to consult her heir on matters connected with the estate. He, Vivian, was almost sacred in her eyes as the future lord of Glengarvon, and she was eager that he should interest himself in the estate and adopt her method of managing it.

He found the châtelaine surrounded by a mass of papers and talking earnestly with her legal adviser, Morris.

"Little brown beast," thought Vivian, as he vouchsafed him a haughty bend of the head. "Why does he always look as if he'd like to jam a knife into me? Knows, I suppose, that the day I succeed to this place his is done."

"I wanted to explain about these leases to you, Rex," said the baroness. "They, I mean the farms, are in the rich level land near Rockborough, and they have fallen in on account of the tenant's death. In one case there is no son to succeed, so I think I am fully entitled to raise the rent at least five per cent."

And they plunged into an animated discussion, in which Vivian took part heartily. He, too, was keen on the acquisition of money, if only to spend it.

They were interrupted by the luncheon-bell.

"I should like to decide this matter to-day. Wylie will give you luncheon, and we'll settle everything after," said the baroness.

"Your ladyship will excuse me," said the lawyer, rising, "but I have business at Brydon Hall. Sad business, too! I heard this morning that young Lady Elmore died at Sorrento on her way to Palermo." His rugged, squeaky voice faltered. "You'll excuse me, my lady, but I knew her well. She was a motherless bairn, and when her father, Squire Houghton,

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smashed up, nigh twenty years ago, she was a sweet young leddy. I was able to be some comfort to her in the black days. She went away to a relation in London. Then Sir Robert Elmore married her. Eh, she was bright and bonnie, though never strong, when her boy bairn was born. You will remember, sir?" to Vivian. "It was a little afore you and poor Master Vivian came down here. Then a sort o' blight seemed to come over her, the baby died, and she just withered away. You'll mind on it, sir, for you used to be acquainted with her in the old days."

"Dead!" exclaimed Vivian. "I cannot believe it! So fair and young! She never had much strength. A nervous, sensitive creature, always doubtful of herself. That old fellow, Sir Robert, could not have taken proper care of her."

"I think he did, sir. The man who could have neglected or injured *her* would have been a brute beast. And I ask the beasts' pardon for likening them to him." He paused an instant, and resumed in an altered voice, "I shall have the honour of waiting on your ladyship to-morrow about eleven."

"Very well. Thank you, Mr. Morris," said Lady Glen-garvon, who was always courteous in a dry way to her employés. And the old lawyer hurried away.

"Poor Mr. Morris! He seemed quite excited," she said.

"He does not give one the idea of an emotional person," observed Vivian, coolly.

"No, certainly not. But, you see, when Houghton of Thirlsmere died his poor daughter was absolutely penniless, and, as her father had quarrelled with all his relations, there was no one to do anything for her; so old Morris took her to

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live with him for some time and was wonderfully fond of her. Then an aunt or a cousin, some one in London, thinking Morris would leave her money, took her up."

"Yes, I have heard the story from herself. Great pity her boy died. He would have been a stay to her and given her a position. She was very fragile mentally and physically,—all heart, you know, and uncommonly little head."

"You certainly found her or her husband amusing, or you would not have spent so much of your time at Brydon Hall," returned the baroness, drily.

"What can one do in June and July but worry one's neighbours? Lunch waits, madam, and your fair niece is hungry after rambling round the stables with me."

Lady Glengarvon thrust her papers into a large bureau, locked it, and put the key in her pocket.

"I must say Morris startled me to-day. I had no idea he had so much feeling."

"Touching, is it not, in such a desiccated old piece of parchment?" said Vivian, aloud. "Damned infernal, meddling old blockhead!" he added, silently, in strict confidence to himself.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. QUENTIN was a very popular and well-known little woman. She was not only lucky, but knew how to make the most of her luck. Though belonging to a family whose men were remarkably good-looking she was not pretty; she had a graceful figure, fine hair, and unerring instinct in the

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matter of dress. Moreover, she had a good fortune, bequeathed by a crabbed, cynical old bachelor relative whom she was fortunate enough to amuse, and as soon as she was actually in possession of it, she bestowed it and herself on an impecunious young foreign office clerk who had little beyond a handsome presence to make up for his want of fortune, and had never risen above an assistant clerkship. They were an exceedingly happy couple, however, and fitted each other admirably. Despite a very gentle, unassuming manner and a soft, sweet voice, Louisa Quentin had an inordinate love of power and managing, and her husband was wax in her hands, believing implicitly in her superior wisdom and skill and every other attribute which can enrich a woman. Her word was his law, and he enjoyed his subserviency, going on his way without a thought or a care, and made supremely happy and comfortable at home, he justly considered himself the luckiest fellow alive.

Two children blessed this well-assorted union,—a girl of seven and a boy two years younger.

Part of Mrs. Quentin's inheritance was an unpretending, roomy, old-fashioned house in D—— Street, one of the many which intersect the central district between Piccadilly and Park Lane, and here pleasant people and celebrities of high and humble degree were to be met with in and out of season. Indeed, the out-of-season "time" was Mrs. Quentin's time of social importance, when politicians and diplomatists, great lawyers and potent critics, were necessarily in town.

Then the workers and wire-pullers, not yet overburdened with engagements, loved to look in D—— Street and take a cup of tea in the foggy twilight of London's midwinter after-

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noons. Mrs. Quentin had "afternoon tea" long before most of the great ladies had started it, and ages before it was dreamed of by suburban gentilities.

The change from Glengarvon to such a home was indeed a startling metamorphose to Constance. She was glad to accept Mrs. Quentin's invitation, and most thankful to get away from her present surroundings, but she was a little afraid of her hostess as something formidable in her cleverness and worldliness, and she found a feeling of reluctance to leave her aunt deep down in her heart when the time for parting came.

"You will be very lonely, Aunt Elizabeth, here in the long winter's evenings when I am away."

"I don't think I shall, Constance. You know you never did anything but read and knit, except when you darned some stockings for me. Then when you are away I shall not have the drawing-room fire lighted at all, and sitting in the study, I can get all my books made up and balanced by New Year's day. I shall really not miss you much."

"I think you will, aunt, a little. I *should* like to come to you at Christmas. I am a little help then, am I not?"

"Well, yes, you are just then. But I doubt if it is worth the cost of the journey to and fro."

"If I save it out of my dress allowance, Aunt Elizabeth?"

"Ah!"—a long-drawn-out ah!—"that is different. Try and save anyway, my child. It *is* such excellent discipline for the mind. I should be pleased if you could save a little. Save for yourself."

"You have been very good to me," resumed Constance, tearfully, "and I must have cost you a quantity of money."

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"Well, yes, my dear, a good deal. But it could not be helped. You were alive and had to be kept alive. Then I was very fond of your mother. Dear me! how bright and pleasant things seemed when she was here! You are like her, Constance, but not so handsome."

"Ah, no! I am not handsome at all."

"You are better looking than you used to be. But you must go now or you will lose the train. Be very careful of your clothes, and mind all that Rex Vivian says to you. I have appointed him in a way your guardian, and he will give you your, or, rather, *my* money."

"Oh, aunt, *do* send it to Mrs. Quentin! I do not like having it from Rex."

"Nonsense, child! There, go; and be sure you do not give any of your money to Barbara. She will be mad about dress when she finds herself in London."

And so Constance tore herself away from the only home she had ever known, which she loved dearly yet longed to leave. And all the weary way to town, which was far longer and wearier in those days than at present, she thought over the past and pictured the scenes through which she had passed with Alan Musgrave. Where was he now? Near the end of his long voyage,—there was no Suez Canal short cut in those days,—and how was he? Miserable and heart-broken! Herded with rough and brutal men, in all the physical discomfort of a position far below what he had been accustomed to. Yet her knowledge of Alan's character told her that it would take a great deal to beat him down. He had will and energy enough to put a bridle in the jaws of circumstance and ride the leviathan out of the ruck. If she only knew that he

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was well and happy, not pining for home and for herself, she, too, could gather courage to look the future in the face.

Constance was not so absorbed in herself that she did not observe her faithful handmaid, who was very grave and tearful.

"Why, Barbara, I thought you would be glad to go to town and see your people?"

"So I am, miss; 'specially mother. But somehow I'm sorry to leave Glengarvon and some of them there."

The plunge into a household such as Mrs. Quentin's was a wonderful revelation to Constance Morton. The order and luxury, the brightness and content, which reigned there charmed and cheered her. She was very cordially greeted by both master and mistress, and felt angry with herself for accusing Mrs. Quentin of worldliness, as she felt the soothing of her simple, unpretending manners. Then the presence of the well-trained children was a new delight. She had never been in the house with little ones before, and they effectually drew her out of herself.

Both boy and girl resembled their father in looks, but in nature Hilda was a replica of her mother.

"You did not tell me that Miss Morton was handsome, Lou," said Jack Quentin, as his wife came in to his smoking-room after seeing her guest to hers.

"I did not think she was. When I saw her last she was thin and sallow and gawky. I do not think I should have taken her to stay here if Rex had not told me she had great capabilities. I fancy she will attract. Anyhow, it is always better to back Rex up, though I am by no means sure what he will do with her. She is a nice sort of girl and has the l'Estrange

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voice. I am glad to say it is the only thing about Lady Glengarvon that her life has not indurated and roughened."

"Well, her niece is an uncommon taking girl, as you'll find before many months are over," said Quentin, sagely. "I wonder if your brother means to marry her?"

"It is impossible to say. He is about the most *un*marrying man I ever met. However, my mind is rather relieved since Constance arrived. I have been uneasy ever since I agreed to take her. A girl who does not belong to you is such a nuisance in the house generally. But I always find it rather hard to say no to Rex."

"I fancy so do other women besides you, Lou."

"Oh, nonsense! You should not listen to idle gossip. We must not let Constance Morton idle away her time till Christmas. She must take music lessons and read French with Mademoiselle."

"My dear little woman, you don't keep an establishment for young ladies."

"Nevertheless she must be coached up a little. Not that I think much education at all necessary for a woman, unless, indeed, she is extremely ugly, and even then—— There is myself, I have neither looks nor learning, and yet——"

"There's no one quite like you, little woman, so you need not compare yourself with any one."

"You are a dear old noodle!" returned his wife, affectionately.

The first week of her stay in London the astonishment of Constance and her interest in the many aspects of the mighty city knew no bounds. Late and early she was up and afoot, for she was a tireless walker, and Mrs. Quentin found it a very

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fortunate circumstance that her young charge had a steady, sensible attendant who knew town well. But in a surprisingly short time she became acclimatised and quite at home in Mrs. Quentin's house.

The days passed rapidly and pleasantly in such a variety of occupations and amusements as Constance had never dreamed in the unbroken monotony of her old home. While instead of being bored to death with lessons when she expected a round of excitement, she heartily enjoyed her musical studies and worked quite seriously. To go into Hyde Park with the children was a real joy, and to find that they listened to her stories with eager interest a source of pride.

It was an unusually fine November, and Constance thought the climate of London had been cruelly belied.

All this time Rex Vivian was away, sometimes in Paris, but chiefly busied in working up his popularity in the insignificant little market town of Easthorpe, in the representation of which a vacancy was soon expected, which he was eager to fill.

Mrs. Quentin never gave a big dinner, rarely exceeding six guests, and these chiefly men. As soon as Constance was well and becomingly dressed she was introduced to her hostess's friends, and soon began to enjoy the frequent informal bright little gatherings for which the Quentins' house was renowned. Then for the first time she heard talk worth listening to, and, though almost always silent, her speaking face, her earnest attention, and ready smile at humourous or witty remarks made her silence eloquent. By degrees the older men begun to notice and speak to her with the kindly sort of patronage old worldlings are often ready to extend to attractive girls. Her earnestness and frank, simple forgetful-

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ness of self put her at ease even with the most distinguished, though there was always a strain of shy self-distrust in her manner, which to many lent it an additional charm.

The beginning of December was wet and disagreeable, and one morning which had promised fairly she was with the children caught in the Park by a heavy shower. They ran home as fast as they could, and came into the dining-room, where Mrs. Quentin was just sitting down to luncheon, with glowing cheeks.

The lady of the house was not alone. Two gentlemen not yet seated at table came forward to meet Constance, while the children bounded past her to embrace and cling to him, exclaiming, "Uncle Rex ! Uncle Rex ! Oh, where have you been, Uncle Rex ?" Then she found herself shaking hands with Dr. Chaldecott before Vivian could extricate himself from the children.

"Run away, dears ; get off your damp things and come back quickly to dinner," cried Mrs. Quentin. "A pleasant surprise, is it not, Constance ? Why, I do not think you have seen Rex since you came to town."

"No," put in Vivian, his eyes dwelling on his young *protégée*. "The only time I was a few hours in town I called here, and with my usual ill luck found Constance away at her dress-maker's ; and as that meant hours, I gave it up and caught my train. Why, Constance, most young ladies lose their roses when they come to London ; you have collected more than you could ever boast at Glengarvon."

"We have run all the way home from the Park gates, and I feel in a fever." And she pressed her hands against her burning face.

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"And you are exceedingly rude, Rex, to call attention to any young lady's roses or lilies," said his sister. "Now tell us whence you come and whither you are going."

"I come last from Glengarvon."

"Oh, indeed," cried Constance, "dear Glengarvon! And how did you find Aunt Elizabeth?"

"What! Do you want to go back there?"

"No, no, indeed! Not for some time at least. I am so very, very happy here. But is my aunt very, *very* lonely."

"I do not think she is, or if she is, she is not aware of it."

"I thought she would have missed me more," said Constance, rather sadly.

"Be thankful she has not chained you to your kennel. The old place looked dreary enough, but everything is much the same," and he added some details respecting her four-footed favourites. "Now," he continued, "are you aware that our good, our incomparable doctor is a married man, and just returned from his wedding tour?"

"Yes, I knew," said Mrs. Quentin, with a friendly little nod. "Pray is Mrs. Chaldecott in town? I should like to have the pleasure of calling on her."

"You are very kind, Mrs. Quentin, but I left Mrs. Chaldecott in Paris."

"What! Tore yourself away so soon! I could not have agreed to that in her place."

"Oh, yes, you would, Louisa, if, as in this case, it was a matter of business."

Here the reappearance of the children broke in on the con-

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versation, and other topics succeeded, which lasted till they returned to the drawing-room, and the children with their governess departed to their own territory.

"Now, Chaldecott, tell my sister your plan ; she might help you," said Vivian.

"If you will excuse me for troubling you with personal matters," began the doctor, and proceeded to explain that, finding the cost of buying a practice and settling in London beyond his means, he thought of settling himself in the neighbourhood of Paris and opening a home for backward or undeveloped boys, where their health, mental and physical, would be carefully attended to, and their education pressed forward so far as was consistent with their condition. "Of course, I should studiously avoid giving the idea that I kept anything like a home for imbeciles. Any troublesome boy might be sent to me for discipline and training, or non-troublesome ones, either," added the doctor, laughing. "I think I have rather a gift in that line ; at least I am well tempered and sympathetic. Moreover, I have an able coadjutrix in my wife, an opinion Mr. Vivian shares."

Mrs. Quentin took up the idea eagerly. She had a great taste for "undertakings," and the details of Chaldecott's plan were discussed with great interest, Mrs. Quentin making a few excellent suggestions, and Constance listening with all her ears, full of good wishes for the newly-married pair. After a while Vivian had a little business talk aside. Constance ventured to ask the doctor a few questions. "Did Mrs. Chaldecott ever see poor Tom?"

"No, Miss Morton ; until he died we were only engaged on sufferance. In fact, I could hardly have married and

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brought her into constant contact with so trying and unpleasant a subject as poor young Vivian."

"I can understand that. How good and kind and wise you were with him! I should like to tell people about you. Then every one with a sickly, silly son would want to place him with you."

"You would be a friend indeed."

"Is Mrs. Chaldecott dark or fair?"

"She is a little between; but, of course, I think her lovely, etc., etc.," said the doctor, laughing.

"Yes, of course. The people we love must always seem beautiful to us."

"A delightful doctrine, Miss Morton." And Constance talked on very happily for a few minutes with him.

"Come along, Chaldecott," exclaimed Vivian. "We are keeping my sister from the important business which I know always awaits her out-of-doors of an afternoon. I say, Lou, will you give me my dinner to-day?"

"So sorry I cannot. We dine at the Mowbrey Frasers' to-night."

"Oh! And how do you like dining out?" to Constance.

"Constance does not go out at all yet awhile. She may after Christmas a little. I want to keep her 'in' as much as possible till the first drawing-room."

"Why, that is months off. What do you say to this incarceration?"

"I am perfectly happy and always amused. Life seems to me one infinite variety."

"Enviably creature! Well, I confess, though many years

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your senior, I do not find life monotonous yet. Good-morning, Louisa. Remember you owe me a dinner."

"Let me pay my debt the day after to-morrow; and, Dr. Chaldecott, do give us the pleasure of your company also." Dr. Chaldecott accepted, and then the visitors departed.

Mrs. Quentin and her husband at this time frequently dined out, but Constance always made herself very happy during their absence in the school-room, where she talked and read and worked with the French governess until it was time to go to bed, where she generally took a book, Mrs. Quentin having a goodly supply from Mudie's.

On the present occasion she had been earnestly trying to convey in her best French to Mademoiselle some idea of the wild beauties of Glengarvon, and she was laughing at her own mistakes, when the butler opened the door and said, "If you please, Miss Morton, Mr. Vivian is in the drawing-room, and would be glad to speak with you."

Constance started up, a strange thrill, half fear, half pleasure, striking through her.

"Mr. Vivian!" she repeated, in infinite surprise. "Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, 'm. Mr. Vivian asked for you, 'm, plain enough. I have lighted the lamp in the drawing-room and the fire is still pretty fair."

"Well, good-night, Mademoiselle. I suppose he has some message for me from my aunt, and when he leaves I shall go straight away to bed."

Vivian was standing on the hearth-rug when Constance, feeling strangely tremulous, walked into the room.

"Why, Constance, you look more frightened than pleased

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to see me! You ungrateful girl! You might have guessed I should manage to have some private talk with you before I slept to-night, as I had no chance of speaking to you to-day."

"Oh, no, I am not ungrateful. Only it seems so late to come."

"Oh, pooh! Nonsense! Hours in the country and hours in town are very different things. I have been dining at my club, and am on my way to my temporary abode, so I thought I would comfort myself by a chat with you."

"Have you any message for me from Aunt Elizabeth?"

"Nothing, except that you were to look on *me* as a guardian and do as I bid you."

"I cannot serve two masters," she returned, with a smile.

"I consider myself Mrs. Quentin's ward and *protégée*."

"You'll find *my* protection a useful supplement. But time will settle that question. May I sit down, or do you mean to keep me standing in order to shorten the interview?"

"Sit down," she said, taking her own place on a sofa by the fire, and he took his beside her.

"Now, let me look at you," he began, and she found her eyes attracted to his in a way she half dreaded yet could not resist. "Yes, you are looking better than I ever saw you look before. You have woken up, and you have a pretty becoming frock—gown—— What do you call it?"

"A dinner dress. Your sister has wonderful taste, Mr. Vivian."

"Have you gone back to Mr. Vivian? That won't do, Constance. It must be Rex, *dear* Rex, if you please."

"No, it does not please me just now. Sometimes, if the spirit moves me, I may call you dear Rex, but——"

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"I am going to prove that I deserve to be dear now this very moment, so you shall not finish your sentence." He drew a letter from his breast-pocket as he spoke. "First tell me, how goes Memory? Is she clear and vivid, or are her pictures fading away?"

"Rex," in a troubled voice, "you are unkind. You promised you would never mention——"

"I know," he interrupted. "But it is hard to keep my promise when that little tableau is perpetually before my eyes, rousing my inmate, the devil, from his usual state of good-humoured indifference. Ah! if you knew. But you shall some day. Just now you are going to give me plenary absolution. Here"—opening his letter and looking through it till he found what he wanted and doubled down the page—"here is a letter in answer to one from me which I had from a chum of mine, Major Conroy, who got his step just before the Rifles started for India. He could not write before leaving." He handed the letter to Constance, who flushed and then grew pale as she read: "I shall not forget your recommendation of young Musgrave. I have had my eye on him for some time, as he was attached to my company when he first joined. I consider him the making of a first-rate soldier. He is perfectly sober and steady, and though very silent and reserved the men don't dislike him, for he is plucky and well-tempered. If I don't mistake he has both brains and education, and will find his opportunity in the ups and downs of Indian military life."

Constance read the passage twice, and then handed the letter back to Vivian, whose eyes had dwelt upon her intently while her own were engaged, as if he were learning

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every line, every trait, of her slight girlish figure, her speaking face, off by heart.

"Thank you," she said, low and softly. "You *are* good; you are better than I thought. Thank you, dear Rex." He took the letter and the hand that held it.

"What glamour has that farmer boy thrown over you, Constance," he said, with suppressed passion, "that your colour changes and your hand trembles at the sight of his name?"

"It is not that exactly," she said, trying to steady her voice. "But if you knew how miserable it makes me to think that I have been a source of misfortune to him. Think of any one so good, so nice as—as Alan Musgrave living among rough, coarse, common soldiers, and all my fault!" In the moment of mental agony she pressed the hand that held hers tightly in both her own.

"Do not exaggerate matters," said Vivian, drawing her closer. "It may be the best thing that ever happened to young Musgrave. He is evidently a soldier by nature, and may distinguish himself and have to thank you for driving him out of Paradise. Poor fellow! It must have been a rough time. Had I been your lover, Constance, you would not have got rid of me so easily. I have a certain pertinacity which is not particularly good for myself or others."

"Ah! very few are so good, so conscientious, as Alan," she replied, so absorbed in the contemplation of Musgrave's excellence that she did not heed or take in the full meaning of Vivian's speech, and she gently drew her hand from his.

"Of one thing you may be assured," continued Vivian. "Whatever I can do to push his fortunes I will. Later on I

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may have more influence ; but you must promise to forget, to put this presumptuous son of the soil out of your thoughts."

"I do try, Rex. I do, indeed. And if I know that he is happy and winning his way upwards I shall be able to forget so much better. Indeed, I have thought lesss about Alan since I came here. There is so much to see and think about. But, Rex, I shall never be so fond of any one else, I am quite sure. He is so good and thoughtful and gentle."

"Pray cut short your eulogiums. Do you consider that this is making yourself agreeable to me?"

"I was not trying, Rex. I was only thinking of Alan."

"Well, you have effectually warned me off the subject ; and don't be sentimental, Constance. By this time next year you will have quite forgotten your first lover, and probably be married to your second. By the way, that little meeting in the wood might not be a pleasant story to come to a husband's ears?"

"Do you think, Rex, I would marry any one without telling him all about it?"

"Better take one who knows all about it already, Constance."

"That is impossible. And you are only teasing to suggest it."

"Then I am tormenting myself, and with devilish ingenuity if you knew but all."

"Rex dear, it is very late ; had you not better go away?"

"Yes, I suppose I had. Now we have cemented a close friendship to-night. You have called dear Rex three or four times, and I am fairly content. I don't think I can see you to-morrow. I shall be very busy. Do you wear my rings?"

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Yes. Never leave that opal off. I wore it for a while. My influence has passed into it, and it shall make you think of *me* !”

“It has not hitherto, Rex. But I will think of you to-night, and thank you in my heart as long as I keep awake.”

Vivian made no reply. He caught and kissed her hand with a lingering kiss, and then quickly left the room.

It was long before Constance closed her eyes. She was feverish and uneasy. She was very grateful to Vivian, but a curious dread of him like what she used to feel months ago at Glengarvon returned in an intensified degree to disturb her. Of late he had slipped from her memory. Now he seemed to have taken possession of her, and she felt as if his grasp of her was tightening and that no power of her own could loose it. She sat up in her bed, and drawing off the opal ring, threw it away as far as she could, telling herself it would be quite enough to wear it in the daytime to fulfil her implied promise to Vivian.

CHAPTER XI.

SOMEWHAT to her mortification, Constance found that Lady Glengarvon was really averse to her proposal to spend Christmas at the Tower.

“I really thought she would have wished for me,” she said to Vivian and his sister, while her eyes looked suspiciously moist.

“She would have loved to have seen you, loved she not money more,” he remarked.

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"I fear that is the case," added Mrs. Quentin. "Money has become a perfect craze with her. I really think she is fond of you in her way, Constance."

"If she is not, I am, indeed, alone in the world," said Constance, sadly.

"Don't fret yourself about matters of no importance. You need never be alone unless you choose, and your business at present is to enjoy yourself and see the world," said Vivian.

"I have secured a box at Covent Garden for to-night. They give 'The Bohemian Girl.' The music is no great things, judges say, but it is tuneful and amusing."

"How delightful! I do so greatly want to hear an opera!" cried Constance, her lustrous dark eyes flashing through the suspicious moisture that dimmed them.

"I am by no means a musical fanatic, but I like 'The Bohemian Girl.' I suppose at this time of the year they have rather a scratch crew."

"Constance will not be too critical," said Vivian, laughing. "Going out, Constance?"

"Yes. Hilda and Jack heard that the Serpentine showed symptoms of being frozen over, and we are going to look at it."

"Well, good-bye till to-morrow. I can't go with you to the opera, but I'll look in on you during the evening. Chaldecott will take my place."

"Yes, do come," urged Constance, as she left the room.

A silence of some minutes followed her departure.

Then Mrs. Quentin laid down some point-lace work at which she was a proficient, and asked, "Rex, what are your intentions?"

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"What do you mean, you small sphinx?"

"You have been about ten days in town, and the greater part of your time has been spent in the service and the society of Constance Morton. What do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" he repeated, slowly. "So far, nothing,—nothing definite."

"Then I shall do my duty as watch-dog or chaperon, and forbid you the house. You shall have no privileges because you are my brother."

Vivian leant back in his chair and laughed heartily. "You are a deuced sharp little woman!" he said. "What is the matter? What are you afraid of?"

"Well, Rex, you are rather unscrupulous, and, I am told, dangerous. Of course, you do not seem so to me. But Constance is very young in some ways for her age, and I see that you are acquiring an influence over her. Now, I greatly doubt if it would suit you to marry, now that you are financially independent. Of course, when the baroness first suggested your marrying her, a comparatively small fortune would have been a great help to you; but as poor Tom was taken so much sooner than we expected——"

"Exactly," interrupted Vivian, thoughtfully. "Things have changed a good deal, and I may need a wife of a different stamp."

"Yes, you would, Rex. You are a nice brother. But I fancy you would be a bad husband, particularly to a girl like Constance, who has more heart than is good for her."

"Exactly," he said again. "It's a most inconvenient possession."

"No doubt; and that girl is sensitive. I don't want to

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puff up your conceit, but I see her change colour when she meets your eyes, and that is very often, Rex. You do not control them well, I assure you."

"Change colour? Yes, she does. I see it too, but I understand why. You do not. I believe that in her heart or mind, or whatever feels, she is disposed to dislike me,—to dislike me considerably,—but I can influence her in spite of herself. How and why I cannot explain, but I know it. I don't think I ever felt this before, and it makes the game very exciting. I don't know when I enjoyed anything so much. It will be a waiting game too, I can see. How it will end who can tell? If a very good marriage offers—well, I will not interfere, and possibly I may marry her myself. She is going to be a splendid woman. She has a great deal more brain than I thought, and——"

"You may not be able to help yourself, Rex," said his sister, with a keen glance.

"You think so, eh? Well, we'll see. At any rate, I may count you an opponent."

"Yes, certainly."

"Good! Forewarned is forearmed, and so good-bye. I am going up to Scotland for some shooting to-morrow night. There is to be a big party at 'The McKilligen's.' Then I am going on to Tulloch. I shall not be back till near Christmas. I shall find you, I suppose? You always eat the family plum-pudding in town?"

"Always. Good-bye, Rex. We'll see you to-night."

While this dialogue was going on Constance had taken refuge in her favourite retreat,—the school-room, which was also the play-room. There she found the son of the house

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extended on the floor building the Tower of Babel with some very superior bricks.

"All alone, Jack?"

"Yes. Mademoiselle has taken Hilda to the dentist's. I didn't want to go; I'm always afraid they will put me in the chair; and though Hilda pretends she don't mind, I see the tears in her eyes, I do."

"Then Hilda is really brave if she pretends bravery."

"Mother says it is not right to pretend."

"Oh, Jack, you don't understand! If you can *act* bravely, then you are brave. But I am silly to explain. Shall I help you to finish your tower?"

"No, thank you, Constance; but oh, stay and tell me that story about the brownies on the moor!"

"Not now, dear; I want to speak to Barbara."

"Barbara is in your room crying."

"Crying? Oh, Barbara never cries."

"Yes, she *was* crying. I went to look for your big fairy picture-book, and Barbara was sitting on the sofa crying and her work on the floor. I ran away; I don't like people crying."

"I must go and see what the matter with her," said Constance, and went quickly to her own room. Barbara was still there, but no longer humming; she was diligently at work relining the hem of her evening-dress; her eyes looked suspiciously red. She required an ever usual respectful observance which all the familiar to her mistress never tempted her to forego.

"Barbara! are you not well? Master Jack told me he found you in tears. Don't think me prying or intrusive, but

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it is so unlike you; you were always so bright and cheerful. I can't help feeling anxious."

"Oh, dear, no, 'm, there is nothing the matter," said Barbara, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "I was a 'wee silly,' as they say at Glengarvon!"

"Do you mind telling me what was the matter with you, Barbara?"

"Well, I do and I don't, miss." And she laughed a sort of shy little laugh. "But if you'd care to hear my bit of trouble, I'm sure I'll be glad to have the comfort of speaking to you."

"Then do tell me. I should be glad to be of any use to you. You know you were a comfort to me, and seem to forget all about it."

"Yes, miss, I shall forget," said Barbara, earnestly.

"Now *your* story, Barbara."

"Well, 'm, you see I used rather to keep company with Mr. Macpherson, the head gardener, for some time before we left Glengarvon."

"I know, Barbara," with a grave smile. "The only flowers that ever made their way to my room were given to you."

"Well, yes, miss. He v tenuous with the flowers."

"My aunt's flowers," r stance, gently.

"Well, that's true, Miss e." And Barbara caught up her work and began st riously.

"The day before we can from home, miss,—and you made it seem home to me. Macpherson made me an offer, and spoke very handsome about me and his plans. He had saved a good bit, and I was to save all I could, and when we

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had scraped a bit together he hoped to get a better appointment in some big place, or buy part of a business of his own ; and as I always liked him, and to tell you truth, miss, no other man ever thought of making love to me (laughing happily) or saying I was nice, so, of course, I thought *him* very nice, and I promised to take the matter into consideration. So I did, miss, for I considered nothing else, and Jim Macpherson he did write beautiful letters, and I wrote and said I would marry him if all went well before two years were out. Then he wrote saying how he looked forward to Christmas, for he made sure as how we would be sure to spend Christmas at Glengarvon, so did I, miss, and this morning I had a letter from him, wrote *that* heartbroken, that feeling rather miserable and disappointed myself, I could not keep from crying off and on all day, miss ; but it is all foolishness, for, of course, if I do not go one time I will another ; and anyway, miss, Macpherson can come and see me."

"I am very sorry you have had this disappointment," said Constance, softly. "I am sorely disappointed myself. I was sure that Macpherson was paying court or attention or whatever it is called to you. He seems a very steady, respectable man, but I have always felt there was something a little shifty and uncertain in his eyes ; still, that is only my fancy. It is trying that you cannot see him this Christmas, but we are sure to go down to Glengarvon in the summer, I cannot stay here always, and then you can see as much as you like of each other ; only, it makes me sad to think that you will marry and leave me. I seem to feel how uncertain everything is." She stopped abruptly.

"Oh, dear Miss Constance, I would always stay with you

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if you wanted me, but most likely you will be married before me."

She did not mention that Macpherson had suggested that, seeing the state of affairs, Miss Morton would probably marry Mr. Vivian ere long, and be mistress of a far finer place than Glengarvon, and establish her favourite Barbara in a nice, comfortable home, with emoluments and privileges considerably more important than those now enjoyed by Macpherson.

"That is most improbable, Barbara," returned her mistress, slowly and thoughtfully. "Not that I object to marrying; but if you do not find quite the right person, marriage must be miserable and degrading."

"Well, miss, I think there are many things more degrading than marrying Macpherson."

"Of course, Barbara. I only meant that unless you love your husband heartily and believe in him heartily, you had better not marry at all."

"That's true, miss; but at that rate there would be very few marriages."

"Why, Barbara?"

"For a great many reasons, miss. First, there are very few, I fancy, that want that kind of marriage. Then the right people so seldom meet, and when they do it's generally too late, for they've gone and engaged themselves to other people."

"That is rather a melancholy view of the matter, Barbara; but I suppose true love always brings difficulties."

"I dare say it does, miss. Still, nothing venture, nothing have, and I would rather not be an old maid."

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"I should like to marry, too," said Constance, half to herself; "quite apart from falling in love, to have a nice, pretty home, I do not want anything grand, and a kind, pleasant husband like Mr. Quentin, that I could be very fond of,—oh, and sweet children, like Jack and Hilda. It is the best kind of life."

"Yes, miss; but if you'll excuse me, I must say that Miss Hilda is a limb. The life she leads them in the nursery you wouldn't believe."

"I think I can imagine it," said Constance, smiling; "but she will grow up a charming girl."

"I hope so," ejaculated Barbara. "But she'll never have a heart like yours, miss."

"I hope she will have a stronger one," returned Constance, with a sigh.

"Well, 'm, you needn't trouble. You have only to put out your hand to have one of the first gentlemen going."

"Do not exaggerate, Barbara, or make fancy sketches. Even if I had the power you suppose, it would be of no use if I had not the will to put out my hand." There was a brief pause, then Constance resumed: "We are going to the opera to-night. Is it not delightful? So dinner will be a little earlier. If you put out my dress and cloak and things I can do my hair myself, and you can go away and see your mother. It will—it must comfort you to be with your mother a little while. I fancy that if I had my mother now I should never want any one else, at least not so much. Yes, go to your mother, Barbara, and tell her everything."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Constance! I will go gladly to her, but I don't know as I can tell her everything. I would

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to you. For you see there's father to be reckoned with, and I would rather he did not know just yet."

"Do as you think best, Barbara, but cheer up, perhaps brighter days are coming for us both." And she sighed deeply.

"Then may I go before tea, miss? I am dreadfully afraid Mrs. Quentin will be angry if I leave you to do your own hair," said Barbara, aloud. While she thought, "I believe she cannot get that young fellow Musgrave out of her head."

"Go in peace," said Constance, and left the room to fulfil her promise to Jack.

That evening's experience never quite faded from Constance Morton's memory. Far finer operas and better singers, but nothing ever obliterated that first impression.

She scarcely knew how entrancing music was before. It thrilled her through and crisped the currents of life-blood in her veins. The love-making, however, suggested thoughts of Vivian rather than the sweet, almost homely, affection that still held her heart true to Musgrave.

About midway through the piece, which Chaldecott enjoyed almost as much as Constance, and thereby increased her pleasure, Vivian came into the box, and leant on the back of his young *protégée's* chair for a minute without speaking. When he spoke Constance started, but turned to him with a radiant smile. "Oh, I am so glad you have come! I want to thank you for the great pleasure you have given me. I cannot speak it." And she gave him her hand.

"Don't trouble yourself, Constance. Your eyes say more than a word. Awkward to have such tell-tale windows to your face, when the opera has so entranced you, I suppose

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'Norma' or the 'Trovatore' would send you wild. There are some rare treats in store for you after Christmas, when Alboni and Guiligni and all the stars are here."

"I am quite satisfied now," she said, turning her face to the stage again.

"So am I for the present," remarked Vivian, in a low tone, keeping his place behind her and leaning his arm on the back of her chair, so close that she sometimes felt his breath upon her ear. But somehow or other the charm of the mimic scene had slightly evaporated, perhaps by the suggestion of the strong reality living and breathing beside her.

Presently Constance said, without looking at him, "Rex, I do not think Dr. Chaldecott can see."

"Yes, he can. At any rate, I want to see, too."

"Oh, you have seen everything! Do not be selfish."

"Yes, I will be selfish. I want the best of everything for myself, and I will not relinquish my present view, nor"—in a lower voice—"will I help your little game to get rid of me. I quite understand your ruse. Ah, ingrate! is this my reward?"

Constance laughed. She could think of no other reply. She would not for worlds that Vivian should know the disturbing influence he exercised. He therefore kept his place till the end, occasionally making some remark, critical or amusing, on the performance, or pointed out some celebrity in the audience.

When the opera was over, Vivian accompanied them to D—— Street, where they found Quentin dozing over the dining-room fire. After some lively talk and refreshment, they said good-night and parted.

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Constance found her handmaid waiting to undress her, smiling, alert, and quite restored to her usual cheerfulness.

"It was nice to see mother, miss. It made me feel all right again."

"I am very glad, Barbara, and oh, I have had such a delightful evening!" Whereupon she poured forth a long descriptive account of her new experience, which continued till she caught her attendant in the act of concealing a yawn.

"There, go to bed, Barbara. I forgot you must be tired."

* * * * *

The weeks slipped by with pleasant rapidity, and Constance grew more at home with her hostess's friends. Grave men, of poetical and literary importance, were quite ready to talk to Mrs. Quentin's graceful, interesting *protégée*, who listened so well, with such animated attention and such lustrous speaking eyes, and when she spoke had so soft a voice and, though few, such intelligent words.

To Constance this intercourse was, indeed, a liberal education. Almost all subjects appeared to her in a new light. New worlds of thought, of possibility, revealed themselves to her, including the world within herself, to so large a portion of which she had hitherto been a stranger.

During this period Rex Vivian was frequently absent from town. He had sold his big house in Portland Place and gone into snug bachelor quarters in the Albany, where he often gave gay little suppers after the theatre to his sister and some choice spirits. His conduct towards Constance was very variable. Sometimes he took hardly any notice of her. Sometimes he almost frightened her by his air of proprietorship, and the way in which he seemed to draw a magic circle

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round her, across which none seemed able to pass. What she dreaded most was to be alone with him. Though he never was demonstrative, it always seemed to her that the peculiar power or glamour he exercised over her was then irresistibly strong. That move as she might from one part of the room to another she never could escape his eyes. That to leave him was an impossibility so long as she looked at him. That the only chance of escape was to turn her back before she reached the door and to make her exit quickly. She never felt quite sure whether love or hate for her made the strands of the strange tie between them, and yet he could be kind, generous, and most agreeable, and for the first day or two of his frequent absences she missed him in a curious fashion. But she was always happier and more herself when he was quite away.

Meanwhile, the image of Alan Musgrave was slowly but surely fading from her mind.

She had learned where to look for military intelligence among the endless columns of the *Times*, and was aware that the Redcar Rifles had reached Bombay and had been stationed at Meerut. And still she prayed to God night and morning to guide and protect her beloved playfellow. So midwinter passed, and Parliament met, and Mrs. Quentin began to talk and think of her own court-dress and Miss Morton's, for she had decided to present that young lady at the first drawing-room and get it over. A drawing-room being a supreme bore to the shrewd little woman ; indeed, it had been several years since she had attended one. "I must not drop out of sight altogether, though," she said to Constance, as they sat at tea one afternoon. "Hilda will want my services before I can

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look round. What are ten years? A mere span when one looks back to them."

"I am glad it may not be quite lost time coming with me, Mrs. Quentin. Indeed, I think it a most needless proceeding. I don't suppose I shall ever go to court again."

"Oh, yes, you will. Rex is quite full of your going. He is coming over from Paris to see you dressed."

"I wish he would not!" cried Constance. "I shall be sure to do some awkwardness if Rex Vivian looks at me. I am sure he is unlucky to me."

"Not quite, I hope, dear. He introduced you to *me*."

"That was indeed a good turn," said Constance, smiling, "for which I shall always be grateful."

CHAPTER XII.

It was a dull, bleak morning in the second week of February. Showers of sleet were driven slantingly down D—— Street, and Mr. Quentin loudly bemoaned his fate in having to go out in such weather, as he entered the dining-room as usual just a little late for breakfast.

"It will not be easy to find a cab," returned his wife, who was already ensconced behind the spirit kettle and teapot. "I can hardly scold Constance for staying a little longer in bed this morning, it is so wretched, and she is generally——" The entrance of the young lady cut short her remarks.

"Here, mademoiselle; here are two letters for you," said Mr. Quentin.

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"Two! That is a large allowance for me," taking them. "One is from Madame Clothilde," opening it. "Oh, Mrs. Quentin, she cannot match that shade of opalescent satin you wanted for me, and sends these patterns. This letter is in quite a strange hand, but has the Rockborough postmark."

"Pray open it, my dear," cried Mrs. Quentin, impatiently.

Constance obeyed and glanced at the first line with eager, wide-opened eyes. Then she changed colour, her lips trembled, and she exclaimed, "My poor, dear aunt! Oh, Mrs. Quentin, she has met with a dreadful accident! Do read this!" Thus adjured, Mrs. Quentin took the letter and read aloud as follows:

"MADAM,—It is my painful duty to inform you that your aunt, Lady Glengarvon, has met with a very serious accident. She had driven into Rockborough with a pair of young ponies, bred and broken in her own stables. Being market day, there was much to disturb and alarm the animals, and coming against a drove of rather wild, unruly cattle at the entrance of the town, they took fright, bolted, and after running some distance came in contact with a heavy wagon, tore off a wheel, injured one of the ponies severely, and threw her ladyship under the wagon wheels, one of which went over her arm, which sustained a compound fracture. The shock to the system is very serious. I am thankful to say that I happened to be at hand, and with some difficulty contrived to convey Lady Glengarvon home, and procured a trained nurse, but learning from broken exclamations of her ladyship's that she wished to see you, I lose no time in despatching the painful intelligence. I should be glad of an-

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other opinion, as the shock has been great, and her ladyship's heart is not very strong. May I suggest that Dr. Cruickshank, of Manchester, is a physician of high reputation and great experience, and if you are guided by me I should lose no time in summoning him to a consultation. In the mean time you may rest assured that no care or attention on my part shall be wanting.

I am, madam, your obedient servant,

“J. BARNES.”

“Poor, dear Aunt Elizabeth!” cried Constance. “How dreadful for her to be suffering and alone! though, of course, she will have Wylie and Peggy. What train can I take, Mr. Quentin? Of course, I must go at once. How soon can we be at Rockborough?”

“I feel rather bewildered,” said Mr. Quentin. “It seems a very serious affair. Yes, of course, you must go, Constance; but it is altogether very unlucky!” He rang. “Here, Briggs! Look up the trains for Rockborough, and let me know the first that goes right through. Don’t be so much alarmed, Constance; a fractured arm is pretty bad, but not so very serious, and the baroness is a very strong, healthy woman.”

“Yes, I know; but, oh! Mrs. Quentin, I am so sorry to be away. She will be so miserable and uneasy because she must let people do things for her.”

“Like every one else, she must submit to the inevitable, and you will soon be with her; for though I am really sorry to lose you, you must go.”

Mr. Quentin was obliged to start for his office, and bid his young guest very heartily farewell.

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The rest of the morning passed in hurried packing and preparation. Indeed, Barbara was almost preternaturally active, and it seemed to Constance that she had hardly received the news of her aunt's accident before she was in the train and flying north.

It was a cold, dreary journey. A bitter east wind forced the driving sleet in at the chinks of door and windows. Constance was deeply concerned by this untoward event. She had always longed to be sympathetic and confidential with the only approach to a mother she had ever known, but the baroness had always repelled her,—not by any active unkindness, but by undisguised indifference, which impressed Constance with the conviction that whether she lived or died was of no consequence to Lady Glengarvon. To the uncertainty of her own future she was too young, too ignorant of life, to give a thought. Being of a reflective nature, she sometimes realised the week after next, but little beyond.

She was very weary when, after nightfall, they reached Rockborough, and never did the road to Glengarvon Tower seem so long as they crawled uphill in a hired vehicle.

The old-world dwellers in the Tower were overpowered with surprise to see their young lady arrive so wonderfully soon on the scene of action. The telegraph was not generally used in those days, but she was none the less warmly welcomed. Lady Glengarvon was awake and rather restless, so Constance at once ascended to her aunt's room. The contrast between its grim bareness and the comfort, the prettiness of the rooms she had left struck her forcibly as she crossed the threshold. The baroness lay facing the door, and as she caught sight of her niece an unmistakable look of

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pleasure brightened her strong face and softened her keen eyes. That was enough for Constance. Her aunt *was* glad to have her back. Perhaps she loved her a little, after all.

"Dear Aunt Elizabeth, I was *so* shocked, *so* grieved, to hear how badly you were hurt! Are you feeling great pain now?" And she took the bony hand in her own soft, warm ones, and tenderly kissed her cheek.

"No, my dear," in a surprisingly strong voice; "not great pain. I ache all over, certainly, but I am so restless. I cannot lie still, and moving hurts me. I am glad to see you; but why did you come? I shall be up and about in a few days, and your journey here and back will cost a great deal."

"I shall not go back till you are quite yourself; perhaps not till next year. I think you will like me to be with you."

"Yes, child, yes. What class did you travel by?"

"First class. Mrs. Quentin would not hear of anything else."

"She is a spendthrift, I am afraid."

"Oh, no; no, indeed. She is a great economist, for you know they are not rich, at least for their station, and she manages everything with such care. But, Aunt Elizabeth, you must not talk. Your hands are burning. Who sits up with you?"

"A nurse bodie," said the baroness, who was at times very homely in her speech, "that the doctor sent in without consulting *me*. Now you have come, and Barbara,—I suppose Barbara's with you?—we'll send her away. There is no need to feed and pay a supernumerary."

"But, my dear aunt, we are not skilled nurses!"

"Never mind; you and Wylie and that girl Barbara can

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sit up in turn for the few nights I am up here. Now you will want something to eat. Wylie has some cold grouse in the larder and a few fresh eggs; don't take any of them unless you particularly fancy them, for it costs a fortune to feed up the fowls at this season; indeed, it seems to me that everything costs more than it used, and what they'll all spend and waste and lavish while I am shut up here and not able to move puts me in a fever to think of."

"You will never get well if you worry yourself like this!" said Constance, alarmed at the eager fire of her aunt's eyes, her flushed cheeks, her rapid speech. "I will go away and eat some dinner, and then come back to you. The nurse is in the next room; I will call her."

"It is time for her ladyship's composing draught," said that functionary, bustling in at that moment; "and, excuse me, miss, Dr. Barnes said her ladyship must be kept very quiet indeed, for she is inclined to be very feverish. Fever must be avoided."

"I will go away at once, and ask you if I may return when I have dined."

"Yes, yes, come back. I have various directions to give you, you must look after."

"You will tell me everything when I come back. Try and sleep, dear aunt, while I am away." She slipped noiselessly out of the room.

This was but the beginning of troubles. Lady Glengarvon's fever could not be checked, the very strength and energy of her nature added to the fire which consumed her. For many days she was delirious, and curious were the revelations made in the wild wanderings of her fitful mood. Constance was

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moved by the pathos of her deep-rooted love for the land that had been her forefathers, by the absorbing passion which gave her the strength, the endurance, to reconquer and deliver what was sacred soil to her from the power of the clog,—the clogs of debt, of complicated encumbrance, of neglect, of mismanagement.

It was a long struggle and a weary watch. Constance learned a new and precious lesson,—the care of a fever patient; for she was unwearied in the faithful help she gave both doctor and nurse.

They were rewarded, however, for the grim enemy was beaten back, and once the fever left her, Lady Glengarvon began slowly to gather strength, very slowly, nor was she ever quite the same woman again.

To Constance she seemed improved. She was a little more companionable, a little less reluctant to accept help.

During this long strain Vivian had often written brief letters of enquiry, but had not visited Glengarvon. He had the absorbing occupation of a contested election to divert his mind from private matters, and had even taken his seat and the oaths, proposed the address, and said a few words on a small diplomatic difficulty. Easter was near at hand now, and he hoped to run down for a day or two. "Would Constance not return with him to Mrs. Quentin's," he asked, "and be presented when the world returned from keeping holiday out of town?"

Constance, however, had made up her mind not to leave Glengarvon again till next year, and even that depended on the state of her aunt's health.

The letter which announced this intention excited Vivian's

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deepest indignation. "What sentimental rubbish!" he exclaimed aloud, though he was at his solitary breakfast. He threw the letter from him, and then stretched out his hand and took it up to reperuse, thinking as he did so of the small claim Lady Glengarvon had on the tenderness or consideration of her niece. "Money-grubbing old miser! She has hardly afforded Constance the upbringing of a gentlewoman; but for her innate refinement, her natural nobility, she would be like any local farmer's lass, fit only to make butter and fatten poultry. What is the charm, the fascination of possibilities that pervades her, of which as yet she is unconscious? Is it her intense femininity? Her very strength is so soft, so womanly. I was right to resist the temptation of going down to Glengarvon. I should have lost my self-control, neglected my business, my ambition, and all for what? Oh! I must succeed. I cannot fail. It is only a question of time; already I have impressed her. Her vague fear of me is only the first trembling flame of smouldering passion. But I must be true to myself and not neglect my political prospects. I shall enjoy the games in that curious arena, the House of Commons. Easter is early this year. We are within three weeks of it. And at this stage of affairs staying away will do me more good than being present with her." He went to his writing-table and wrote rapidly a comparatively long letter to Constance, urging her return to London, and setting forth the joys of town in the season; but in all his vivid sentences there was no trace of a lover's phraseology.

Vivian's letters always interested Constance, and she felt flattered that he should speak of his plans and prospects to her.

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Spring was now advancing with swift steps and genial smiles. The moors with their changeful light, as the clouds sailed over them, while the lark thrilled out its marvellous song of ecstasy and thankfulness, and the budding gorse shed its honey sweetness on the air, were inexpressibly delightful. So was the first flush of green over the limes and ash- and almond-trees. Yet a certain sense of depression hung about Constance Morton. She felt that Glengarvon could never again be what it had been.

The baroness was greatly changed, and something told her niece that the sceptre had fallen from her hand, that the future was overcast and uncertain. Moreover, the stillness and monotony of the country was dreadfully dull after the brilliant society to which she had become accustomed to in London.

Perhaps what really grieved her most was the coldness with which Mrs. Musgrave received her when she had nerved herself to call at the dear old farm-house. She was always gentle and kindly, but Constance felt in every nerve that on her head, in the mother's mind, lay the sin of driving her beloved son from his happy home to the dangers and roughness of a soldier's life.

"I will not come again, Mrs. Musgrave," said Constance, sadly, as she took leave. "You do not like to see me, and perhaps it is only natural; but do you think that *yours* are the only tears that have been shed over Alan's exile? Yours the only prayers that have been breathed for him? If so, you are indeed mistaken."

"Perhaps so, Miss Morton," said Mrs. Musgrave, looking wistfully at her. "But it is hard to say. Look at it how

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you will, you and my dear boy have been a misfortune to one another, but *his* has been the worst part."

"It has, Mrs. Musgrave, indeed. Will you not kiss me as you used long ago, when I longed to have a mother?"

Mrs. Musgrave hesitated; her pale blue eyes grew moist. "And I used to feel like one towards you in those days," she said; "but, ah! it was all more misfortune than fault in both you. God bless you, my dear! I feel I can forgive at this moment."

She drew Constance to her and kissed her cheek kindly.

"Good-bye, dear Mrs. Musgrave. Do try to think kindly of me."

This interview made Constance still more desirous to turn her back on the home of her childhood. The baroness being weaker was much more restless and exacting than before her accident, but she seemed to want the company of her niece more than she ever did before, and this created a powerful link to bind Constance to her. In short, life seemed far more gloomy since her delightful visit to Mrs. Quentin, and her only recreation was an occasional ramble with Barbara through the woods or over the wide moor.

Easter was early that year, and Constance found herself looking forward with a vague sense of pleasure to Vivian's promised visit. In his absence she partially forgot the strange, disturbing power he always exercised over her, and only thought of his agreeability, his easy familiarity with all sorts and conditions of men and things, and the flattering interest he took in herself. If only he had not known her love for Musgrave she could have been very good friends with him; but that knowledge was a desecration she could not get over.

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It was a bright but chill afternoon when Vivian reached Glengarvon.

He was not expected till late. The baroness had been out with Constance for a longer drive than usual and was taking a sleep in her own room, Constance was in hers, writing her weekly letter to Mrs. Quentin, when the housekeeper came in hastily to announce the arrival of Vivian, who was a most important person in the eyes of the household.

With an exclamation of surprise Constance hurried to the drawing-room, where she found the guest standing on the hearth-rug before a great wood fire. He started forward to meet her, she gave him her hand, saying, "I am so glad you have come."

"Are you?" holding her hand painfully close between both his own. "Let me look at you, Constance." And he drew her near a window through which the westering sunlight poured, and looked piercingly, with slightly knitted brow, into her eyes, while the old sense of formidable fascination began to quiver through her. "I will conquer this folly," she thought, forcing herself to bear his gaze without visible shrinking. "You have left your roses in London, my sweet!" he went on. "God! how good it is to see you again! Have I not been a faithless recusant to have left you so long alone?"

"No, Rex," laughing as if amused. "Why should you come all this way on my account? It is only lately we have even been friends. I expect no sacrifices on your part. But I have been greatly interested in your proceedings, and read your brief speech with great pleasure. Is it alarming to speak before such a number,—all the members of Parliament?"

"I did not find it all alarming. Only a few were present,

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and they did not listen." By this Constance had freed her hand from his grasp.

"You have had a bad time, I expect," continued Vivian.

"A very anxious time, certainly. You will find Aunt Elizabeth a good deal changed."

"I bring her news which will revive her, if anything can. She bought a lot of shares in a new loop line between Wrentham and Middlewick, and they have run up to double what she gave for them. She must sell out and pocket the difference."

"She is most anxious to see you, Rex. Pray do not contradict her, or as little as possible, for she has grown very impatient. Would you not like something to eat after your long journey?"

"Is there anything in the house? The larder used to be rather bare occasionally. But I see you have more authority than formerly. You have been adding a few more antiquated sticks to the furniture of this old den. Ay, and flowers. What wonders that visit to Louisa has done for you!"

"To know her is a liberal education," returned Constance, smiling.

"When I think of what you were this time last year,—an ill-dressed, taciturn young barbarian, whose great eyes—ah, Constance! they have always been grand eyes—scowled hatred at me. And now you are an elegant, well-bred young lady. Everything changed except the *souppçon* of hatred to me."

"No, no, no!" cried Constance, eagerly, "I am not so worthless, so ungrateful!"

"Then you are really glad to see me?"

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"Yes, really!"

"Can't you send Aunt Elizabeth her dinner in her room? How glorious to have a little *tête-à-tête* repast together!"

"Now you are ungrateful. My aunt looks forward so much to seeing you."

Here the old butler opened the door. "If you please, sir, her ladyship says would you mind coming to see her in her room."

"I am coming. I brought you some new books, Constance, and magazines. You must be half asleep here. Give me *carte-blanche* and I'll get leave for you to come back with me to London. I don't know that I don't like you best without the roses. I am going to make the baroness appoint me your guardian. Ah, Constance, what care I should take of you!"

"Thanks, Rex; I mean to take care of myself."

"That you cannot, my sweet one!" And with a wave of his hand he left the room.

"His memory is better than his presence," thought Constance. "Why does he talk such exaggerated nonsense to me? Is it merely to mock me? Does he think me unworthy of respect because—because I loved Alan? That was not wrong in itself; only unfortunate, and perhaps weak."

Whether it was due to the pleasure of seeing her kinsman and heir, or to the good news respecting her speculation which he brought her, Lady Glengarvon seemed more like her old self at dinner than Constance had seen her since her accident, only her colour was too high and her inclination to talk unusually strong.

Constance gladly subsided into a mere listener until about

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nine o'clock, when she reminded her aunt that she was sitting up beyond her usual time. The baroness stayed a little longer, and then took her niece's arm and wished her guest good-night.

"You will return, will you not?" said Vivian to Constance in an undertone.

"Yes, of course she shall," said the baroness, decidedly. "She shall give you some of the famous whiskey our Cousin Ogilvie, of Denbrae, sends me every year."

"Thank you very much. I should like to taste it," returned Vivian, with a laughing glance at Constance.

"Mind you, go back and see that Rex Vivian has all he wants. Clough knows where the whiskey is. You are not at all polite to Rex, and you know, when I am dead and gone, Rex will reign in my place, and it would be well to make a friend of him."

"Ah, dear aunt ! that is a noble motive for administering a well-proportioned glass of whiskey and water."

"You make very silly remarks sometimes, Constance, though you are a good girl ; better than I thought." And to her niece's surprise the rather stony old woman bent forward and kissed her brow.

When Constance reached the drawing-room she found Vivian in conversation with the butler.

"Clough," she said, "Lady Glengarvon wishes you to bring up some of the Denbrae whiskey for Mr. Vivian ;" adding, as the old man left the room, "My aunt seems to think that if I mix you a glass of whiskey and water you are bound to provide for my future."

"I am quite willing to accept the responsibility, but I shall

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not exact the grog. It is a thing I never touch. I shall present the refreshment to Clough. Here, *ma belle* ! Here is a low, comfortable chair by the fire, and I will take this solemn-looking settee. Let us have the feast of reason and the flow of soul. I have been enquiring into the state of your aunt's stud and find it is in the usual impoverished condition. So we must content ourselves with a long ramble round the farm and woods. I hope you are equal to it, for I want to have you to myself all the afternoon. The morning I must give to my august kinswoman."

The butler came with the highly-prized mountain dew, and retired much pleased with the order to try it himself. Then Vivian began to give Constance an account of his sister, of her London acquaintances, of Dr. Chaldecott and his wife, his home at Passy, his pupils, and many other gossiping particulars, all in the lightest and most amusing strain, while Constance listened, laughed, and knitted. At last she exclaimed, "You have made me forget the time. It is half-past ten. I must say good-night."

"Half-past ten ! Impossible ! Do you think you and I could amuse ourselves in this way every night in the year ?"

"You might amuse me. But I am quite sure I could not amuse you."

"You might charm me."

"Charm ? Ah ! that cannot be done often."

"Well, sweet repose, Constance. Wish me the same, for I have anticipations of a restless night."

Constance had never before found Vivian so agreeable a companion as during these brief Easter holidays. He avoided both looks and words which could startle or annoy her, and

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was generally on his best behaviour. Something of unusual restfulness, too, stole over him in her company, and the possibility of enjoying life without intense excitement or the eager pursuit of something dawned upon him. Lady Glengarvon claimed a good deal of his time, and he generally looked grave when he came from his *tête-à-tête* interviews with her. Once—the morning of his departure—he said to Constance, “I wish to Heaven I could persuade your aunt to make her will !”

“Why?” absently.

“Because if she dies without providing for you, you will be in a bad way. My dear ward (as I consider you), you would not like to be dependent on any one, especially on myself?”

“No, I should not ; and to be a burden on you would be—oh, dreadful !”

“Thanks for the friendly feeling. Do you think you would be a terrible burden, eh, Constance? Well, I hope you never will be. Indeed, I am sure the baroness would give you a handsome *dot* if you marry to please her.”

“I shall marry to please myself, if I ever do, Rex.”

“If. It is if still.” He paused. “Ah, Constance ! we have had some delightful rambles this time in various directions, *but* you never took me down *that* woodland walk.”

“You are most unkind, Rex. Have you not promised more than once never to remind me of the past ? Is this the way you help me to forget ?”

“I am a blockhead, and rather brutal into the bargain. But I cannot get the memory of that kiss out of my mind. It haunts me. When I am away from you the vision fades ; when we meet it mocks me with accursed reality. No one

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can efface it save yourself. How, I dare not tell you yet. Write to me, Constance, and forgive me. I deserve to be forgiven, if you knew all."

"You have been so nice, Rex, this time, that I am quite grieved you should be disagreeable at the last."

"I will earn your forgiveness yet, Constance. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XIII.

"BARBARA'S ACCOUNT."

I MUST say I was sorry when Mr. Vivian left the Tower. I always liked him at that time, and he was very nice to me, speaking quite civil except that once, and then he was so furious I don't think he quite knew what he was saying. This time he bid me good-bye quite pleasantly when I met him on the stair the morning he was to go to town. "I'm glad to find you are of use to your young mistress," he said. "Pray accept an Easter offering." And he put a sovereign into my hand. It wasn't the first, either. I smiled and thanked him, and thought, like the fool I was, that I would have a real smart spring bonnet from Madame Clothilde (who never objected to do a nice bit of suitable millinery for an old hand, and pretty cheap, too). And Jim Macpherson said no one had such bonnets as I had.

It seemed to me that my dear Miss Constance was brighter, and I believe while Mr. Vivian was with us, and when Miss Constance was bright, it would do any one's heart good to hear her laugh ; but she thought a great deal for so young a

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lady, and had a good deal of trouble one way or another. Though my lady never noticed anything much, we missed her greatly now she was shut up in her room. It was very hard on Miss Constance, too, for she never had a minute to herself, for her ladyship had her writing or reading reports from her different bailiffs and agents, and then the poor dear young lady came to terrible grief over her sums and additions, for she never could manage arithmetic.

All this time things were pretty cheerful for me ; Mr. Macpherson was always ready to take me for a walk on the fine spring evenings and was full of plans for our future. He was keen about money, as his countrymen are generally, and I was a little annoyed by his wanting me to ask for higher wages. He made a calculation how much money I could save out of twenty pounds a year, and it certainly wasn't much ; but he did not understand that I would not have distressed my dear young lady about such a matter not for twice twenty pounds. She could not help it. She was worse off, I consider, than myself. I had a trade, and therefore the means of earning my living. Miss Constance had nothing she could call her own, and depended on the will of a rather crotchety, miserly woman, as her ladyship certainly was. If my dear Constance didn't marry to please her she'd cut her off with a shilling I'm quite sure. However, I am convinced she will take Mr. Vivian. He is far gone about her or I am very much mistaken. When ever I see them together, which is not often, I can't help noticing the way she seems to draw him to her for all she is so quiet and composed. If he is reading or writing and she comes into the room, he is sure to get up and settle himself beside her before two or three minutes are over. I don't fancy she

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is as indifferent to him as she used to be. I have seen her start and change colour when she heard his voice suddenly. I wish they would make it up and marry, and then very likely we'd all get settled together ; for there's a talk of Mr. Vivian buying a grand place somewhere down south, and James is full of being head gardener and managing everything in the gardens and hothouses. But I am not so sure about that or anything else.

Though she never names his name, I am pretty sure Miss Constance has not got young Musgrave quite out of her head. Coming back here did her no good, and I do not see much chance of leaving it, at present anyhow.

My friend Lawyer Morris has been to and fro the Tower pretty often, though I never came across him. But Mrs. Wylie tells me he asked more than once for me. I am rather proud of the musty, dusty old gentleman taking notice of me, and I told James Macpherson of it ; so he said, in his droll way, " You hold on to him, my lassie ! There's no knowing how a bit fancy like that may turn out. I'll give you a nice posy to take to him the next time you are going to the town." But I told him I should do nothing of the sort, and we had a bit of a quarrel over it. But he soon coaxed me to make up. Ah ! how well he could talk, and what a lot he knew ! He was very good-looking, too, tall and straight. But it wasn't to write about Macpherson I took up my pen.

It was some time after Mr. Vivian left, well on into May, and fine warm weather. I had gone into Rockborough to do a little shopping for Miss Constance. (Now we were away from town my lady would not hear of any more new clothes or orders to Madame Clothilde, so I was obliged to contrive

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and buy bargains out of my young lady's pocket-money.) I had been in nearly every shop, trying to match a particular trimming, and could not find anything that would do, so I felt tired and hot and vexed as I set my face homeward, hoping the old ramshackle omnibus that plied between the town and Langholme would overtake me and give me a lift more than half-way.

Lawyer Morris lived, as I said before, at the beginning of the town, and as I came near his house, who should overtake me but the old gentleman himself. ‘

“Good-afternoon to you,” said he, very civilly. “I hope I see you well.”

I thanked him, and he walked on beside me.

“You must be back well-nigh three months,” says he, “and I’ve never seen a sight of you before. How are your father and mother? Did you tell them you had met me in these parts?”

“Yes, sir,” I made answer, “and mother remembered you quite well, but father seemed a little hazy.”

“Ah! just so! women have the best memories. It’s a warm day, and you look as if you were weary and hot. Do me the favour of stepping into my little place and taking a cup of tea. There’s no old lady in the three kingdoms can make a better cup of tea than myself, and I’d like to hear how you got on in London, and how you think her ladyship really is, for it seems to me that you are a wise-like girl, Barbara West.”

I thanked him, and was glad enough to sit down and have a nice fresh cup of tea, wondering all the time how a man of his years, who was in and out of all the grand houses in the county, could be such a gossip.

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So he ushered me into his house, such a neat clean place, with old-fashioned polished furniture you could see yourself in, and a cosy parlour looking into such a pretty garden, and there tea was laid, and a spirit kettle ready to be lit, and such sweet old china, and a plate of what they called "slim" cakes in those parts, quite delicious. Mr. Morris he fussed about and lit the lamp and measured out the tea, and I must say I never enjoyed a cup so much.

He was most polite and asked many questions. I declare that old man seemed to have known every one that was any way related or connected with Glengarvon. He remembers Mrs. Quentin when she was quite a little girl, and Mr. Vivian, the father of the poor idiot. I soon found what he was driving at, and that was how Mr. Vivian was getting on with Miss Morton ; but even if I knew I should not have told him. I felt pretty sure my lady had talked to him about her wish to marry her niece to the heir, and my blood boiled at the idea of these two settling who my dear young lady was to marry behind her back.

"Ah!" said the lawyer at last, "I suppose Mr. Vivian is a fine open-handed gentleman, a favourite with the men-servants and maid-servants, ay, and the cattle within the gates."

"Well, sir, I may say he is, for he is civil spoken and quite the gentleman."

"Oh! ay! to be sure. Some people think there is a cruel look in his face."

"Well, Mr. Morris, I do not know much I dare say, but how any one could find cruelty in Mr. Vivian's face I don't know. It seems so bright and open."

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"Open, ay! open enough. Rex Vivian wouldn't condescend to conceal anything, Good, bad, or indifferent, whatever he did he'd brazen out; but as to cruelty, my lass, that's a comparative question. Some call beating and bruising and such like that hurts the body cruel. There's much worse. I knew a sweet delicate defenceless girl once, fair as a lily, trusting as a child, *she* was treated cruel if you like, and murdered under the mask of love. She was a lady born and bred, then left a penniless orphan. By and bye a rich man fancied her and offered her a good home. She married him and was fairly happy; for though a bit tyrannical he was not a bad man, and obedience came easy to her. Then a fellow she had known when she was almost a child crossed her path. He was taken with her; as he never denied himself anything, he determined to win her, and he did, keeping friends with the husband all the time. It was a pleasant pastime and whiled away a summer time. Then the freshness of the game was over, and he went away. But she, a delicate, conscientious soul, left to brood over the laws she had broken, the honour she had dragged through the mire, she sickened and died by inches, of shame,—shame and remorse, without a word of remembrance, a token of tenderness, from the man, her murderer. That was cruelty if you like, eh?"

I could not help exclaiming, "He was a brute!" "Do you mean to say Mr. Vivian would——"

"Come, come, my lass! don't run away with the story," Mr. Morris interrupted. "I never said the blackguard's name was Vivian. I never mentioned any name. It was just a case in point. Take another drop of cream in your



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cup? Ay, bodily hurts heal soon, but a broken heart is ill to bind."

"Anyway," said I, "you don't love Mr. Vivian."

"That's a small matter."

"But it will not be very pleasant to serve him when he comes to be Lord Glengarvon, Mr. Morris, will it?" I asked.

"I'll never serve him, Barbara West. Never!" said the old gentleman, solemnly. "That is," in a different sort of voice, "I'll be past my work if I live till he comes to rule over us; but I hope not, I pray not." And he was silent for a bit.

I was puzzled what to say. It seemed so strange that a shrewd, cunning old lawyer should talk in this way to a servant, though, of course, I was an upper servant; so everything was still for a minute or two. Then Mr. Morris began to ask me about father and mother and the boys, very kind and sensible like, and told me over again how he had met father and was able to help him to the place where he has been ever since, and said how it was such a curious turn of fortune that I should come to live at Glengarvon. Then he said, after a pause, "Now, d'ye hear the pony's feet and the rowl of the wheels? I told my boy to have the trap ready. I'm going up to Farmer Musgrave's, and will give ye a lift so far."

I was thankful for this anyway, and Mr. Morris was very silent all the way to the farm, where I left him. His queer talk gave me plenty to think about. However, I have always remembered mother's warning, "Least said soonest mended," so I never mentioned anything about having taken tea with Lawyer Morris, though I did say to Miss Constance he had

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given me a drive home, or near it. Then she asked, quietly, "Has he heard anything of Alan Musgrave?" Not agitated at all, as she used to be, but quite composed. "He has never named his name to me, miss," was all I could say in reply, which was the truth.

It was not very long after this tea-drinking with the old lawyer, of which I have thought many a time since,—it might be ten days or a fortnight,—when Miss Morton came into my room where I was writing a letter to mother without knocking; she was always that particular as if I had been the mistress and she the maid. She was looking white and her eyes wide opened as if she were scared.

"Oh, Barbara!" she cried, "there is terrible news. Mr. Vivian has sent me the *Times* of yesterday. I have just been reading it to my aunt. The native soldiers have mutinied at a place called 'Meerut,' and at other places, too. I believe they have murdered their English officers, and I know not what besides. The writer goes on to say that the European troops are far outnumbered by the native regiments, and the results they fear will be——" She stopped short as if she could speak no more.

I was shocked, and, knowing what she was thinking about, I forgot myself and cried, "Oh, Lord, miss, that is where young Mr. Musgrave went!"

"It is, Barbara, and he may be dead before even this despatch was written, or perhaps in the hands of these cruel Indians, and tortured. What must Mrs. Musgrave feel! I dare not face her. But for me Alan would be safe in England. But for me——" She sat down and covered her face with her hands.

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"Well, Miss Constance, that is one view; but though he may be a bit hurt, he needn't be killed. Maybe he'll do something very brave or clever and come home an officer. I have read of such things in books."

"I do not seem able to hope. Oh, Barbara! I must go and see Mrs. Musgrave, and try to comfort her. I will write to Rex Vivian, and ask him to send me the papers. Aunt Elizabeth will never take anything but the *Rockborough Courant*. Do you know, she scarcely cared to have this appalling news read out to her. She is greatly changed, Barbara. Formerly such tidings would have stirred and interested her. I wish she had some good London doctor to advise her."

Then we talked a long time about many things, till Miss Constance was obliged to go out with her aunt, who took a drive round the farm every day before luncheon, and had a new pair of ponies as steady as rocks, which Mr. Vivian chose in town and presented to my lady. After luncheon my poor dear young lady had to stay hours—right down hours—writing letters and directions for the baroness. Then at last she got away and came to me.

"It is not much past five," she said. "Come with me through the wood. I can return alone, but I tremble at the thought of what Mrs. Musgrave will say. Yet I will not neglect her. Mr. Musgrave and the men must still be in the fields. I shall see her alone." She put on her hat, and we were soon afoot. Miss Constance was very silent all the way, and when we came to the place where Mr. Vivian caught us all last year Miss Constance stopped. "I will not ask you to come any farther, Barbara," she said. "I have a very little

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way to go now, and coming back is nothing." She smiled and waved her hand as she took the turn to Ravenscroft Farm. But I was not going to leave her that way. I went back a few steps and sat down on a fallen tree, where I could see the path by which she would return, and there I waited till I grew sleepy. I must say I did not like my dear young lady holding on to those Musgraves. It was natural enough that, left to herself as she was, she should have taken up with a tenant farmer's son. They were both young and foolish; but now, after all the company she had seen in London, and having an elegant gentleman like Mr. Vivian devoted to her, in a manner of speaking, it seemed out of all reason that she should still think about a country lad, a common soldier as young Musgrave was. In my own mind I thought that what worried her and haunted her was that she had been the cause of sorrow and suffering to others and could not remedy it, she was so full of feeling for others. I never met any one quite like her for that. I had just closed my eyes, I think, when something roused me, and there stood Miss Constance looking at me with a sort of grave smile.

"So you waited for me, Barbara. Thank you; I am glad of your company." I rose up and we walked on together. Miss Constance held the *Times* doubled up in her hand. "I found Mrs. Musgrave and Mary at home," she said, after a minute's silence. "Mary has been away at school, and was just the same to me as ever. Dear Mrs. Musgrave had heard nothing whatever of these awful tidings from India. They only see the *Rockborough Courant* once a week. She did not seem able to see all the horror of it. She was shocked at those ungrateful Hindoos rebelling against their lawful mas-

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ters, but she cannot see that there can be very much danger to our people where they are armed Englishmen. You can imagine I did not try to enlighten her too much ; let her be in peace as long as she can ; but, she was very nice and kind and thankful to me for going to her explaining things. When I came away she said, ' Good-bye, my dear ! I think you are more easily frightened than myself. But surely a few handfuls of our men would be enough to put down thousands of these poor heathen.' I could not enlighten her as to how we had trained and armed these benighted heathen ourselves and made them formidable foes. I am afraid there is a painful awakening before *his* mother."

"*His* mother !" I thought. It's easy to perceive what name was in her heart. I just said that, like Mrs. Musgrave, I would not have thought our people would have had any trouble in putting down any rebellion in those parts.

Miss Constance made me no answer and seemed lost in her own thoughts.

When we reached home the afternoon post had come in. There were seldom any letters by it, specially for Miss Morton. But to-day there were two, one for her ladyship and one for Miss Constance.

She opened hers at once, and read it standing in the hall.

" Barbara," she said, " this is curious : Mrs. Quentin says she has written to invite herself to Glengarvon. ' The children are going to Brighton with Mademoiselle, and I think I should enjoy a complete rest.' I shall be so glad !"

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CHAPTER XIV.

NEVER was a visit more opportune or a guest more welcome,—at least to Constance. Indeed, after a few days Lady Glengarvon began to be interested in Mrs. Quentin, whom she found to be a past mistress of household management and capable of, at any rate, talking on most financial topics. She was a good whip, too, and often took the place of Constance in the diurnal drives, without which the baroness did not seem able to exist.

To Constance the support and comfort of Mrs. Quentin's presence was great. It was a cruel time, every post brought fuller and more frightful details from India, while the total absence of intelligence from some districts was suggestive of even greater horrors. The inevitable length of time before additional forces could reach the scene of action, the rapidity with which the disaffection spread, the ruthless character of the conflict, all combined to make a picture so dark, so hopeless, that Constance could hardly bear to look upon it, yet was unable to keep it from before her eyes. Indeed, all England shared her dread, her emotion. Who that lived in those days can ever forget the horror that thrilled the heart of the nation when the full knowledge of what they had to face came home to their understandings, and they felt that their existence as a first-class power was at stake.

The national view of the situation did not, we fear, affect Constance Morton very deeply. The horror of the whole thing to her was summed up in the fact that Alan Musgrave

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was face to face with death or torture, or both, and that she had driven him there.

Gradually, as his letters, which had been so regular, failed to reach her, Mrs. Musgrave's sense of security in the invincible character of an English regiment died away, and she, too, longed for tidings and prayed earnestly for her son's safety ; but she never took in the state of affairs so completely as Constance ; she had not the same amount of information as was supplied by the daily perusal of the *Times* and the gossip of the clubs, abundantly supplied to his wife by Mr. Quentin.

All this trying time, then, Mrs. Quentin's presence was an immense help. She relieved guard with the baroness. She helped Constance in many ways, especially by her interesting talk, which drew her mind from the perpetual contemplation of the grievous events which haunted her.

Meantime, Vivian was gaining the ear of the House. He had been a good deal in India for sport and amusement, a sort of diversion much rarer in those days than at present, and had picked up a fair knowledge of native life and character, which he knew how to turn to account. His observations and suggestions were, at all events, listened to if not acted upon.

This was a source of pride to Mrs. Quentin. "I really think Rex is going to be a useful member at last," she said to Constance one evening as they were strolling round the garden. "I began to fear he would always be a rolling-stone and flit from one piece of strenuous pleasure-seeking to another. He is rather a clever fellow in many ways, but terribly self-indulgent. However, I suppose years bring wisdom."

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"I suppose so. I know I feel much older than I did last year."

"And wiser, Constance?"

"Oh, I dare not think that!" A pause ensued.

Then Mrs. Quentin resumed: "Your aunt is greatly aged, Constance, and changed, too. She has really no chance here. If she were under the care of one of our great London doctors there would be some hope for her. But here——" Mrs. Quentin paused expressively.

"I fear we shall never be able to uproot her from Glengarvon," said Constance, dejectedly.

"No, neither you nor I can move her. I must see what Rex can do. He has a good deal of influence. You see the baroness looks on him as something rather sacred, because he is the heir to her estates and honours and savings. She is a wonderful woman. What a pity it is that an ambition honourable in itself should have made her so *inhuman*!"

"That is a strong word," said Constance, smiling.

"But not too strong."

* * * * *

It seemed almost incredible to Constance, but Rex Vivian did succeed in uprooting the baroness in the autumn, and in transplanting her to one of the short streets which connect the Tyburnian squares with Hyde Park.

As may be supposed, it was a herculean task to settle the invalid to her mind.

Rents in London appalled her. Indeed, to pay any rent was most repugnant to her ideas and habits, and after much discussion a compromise was effected by Mrs. Quentin, who suggested lodgings, where rent would also include ser-

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vice ; and, unaccustomed as she was to town life, Lady Glengarvon fondly imagined she gained some advantage by this arrangement.

Here, then, Constance found herself at the end of September in charge of her aunt, with the capable Barbara as aide-de-camp.

In the months which had elapsed since the outbreak of the Mutiny Mrs. Musgrave had had but two letters from her son. The last told her that so far he had escaped with a slight wound, which only incapacitated him for a few days. He made as light as he could of surrounding dangers and difficulties, and told his mother he had just heard that his company was ordered up to a town at some distance, the capital of a small state, the ruler of which was a faithful ally of the English government. It was, however, thought more prudent to send an addition to the guard of Sepoys maintained at the English residency, not only to ensure the safety of the commissioner and his family, but to strengthen the hands of the Nawaub himself, should the mutinous spirit touch his people. "I shall therefore, as you see, my dear mother, be safe enough. This may be a comfort to you ; I hope it will ; but for my part I by no means relish the notion of inactivity when my regiment has the prospect of abundant fighting and distinction. We are praying for reinforcements, which I have no doubt are hurrying to our aid. Once able to take the initiative," etc., etc. The letter continued in a cheerful strain, and greatly delighted the mother. It was duly communicated to Constance, whose warm sympathy had earned her forgiveness.

Her heart was therefore lighter than it had been for some

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time when she left Glengarvon, as Vivian quickly perceived, and wisely forbore all allusion to the forbidden subject.

The great doctor whose skill was invoked by Lady Glengarvon's relatives was less decided and encouraging than they expected. After a careful examination he made many enquiries as to her health history, and elicited some facts quite unknown to Constance. It appeared that when quite a young girl, between fifteen and sixteen, Lady Glengarvon had had a long and dangerous attack of rheumatic fever, after which her recovery was slow though apparently complete.

"These early rheumatic attacks never leave a blessing behind them," remarked the great man. "I should recommend a somewhat prolonged treatment; no attempt at rapid remedies. I will write out a dietary as well as a prescription, and will send you a nurse, to whom I shall give full directions, which must be rigidly carried out. Extreme quiet must be maintained, and everything exciting or irritating must be carefully avoided."

Against this dictum the baroness vehemently protested. She was still a little weak from the effects of her accident, she admitted, but as to needing a nurse and a code of food and exercise, etc., etc., it was all utter nonsense, and she would not submit to it.

Ultimately Vivian and his sister induced her to give an unwilling ear to reason, and the doctor, a grave, stern, impressive personage, produced a certain effect upon his patient. Still, she fought against accepting the position of an avowed invalid, and gave much trouble. In spite of the invalid's contradictoriness, which made every day of "the cure" a struggle, time went quickly. The nurse proved a clever, sen-

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sible woman, who managed her patient successfully, and by degrees Constance had more time to herself, and found herself often hoping that Vivian would look in and tell her the news, the reports, the conjectures, respecting affairs in India.

Seeing more of him, she lost something of the strange feeling—half fear, half pleasure—which his eyes, his voice, always excited, while she felt insensibly flattered by the confidential tone in which he spoke to her of his plans and ambition.

So midwinter passed. The baroness was certainly better, less irritable, and more keenly alive to the reports received from Glengarvon and the directions to be sent there.

Parliament had met again, the clouds in the East began to break, and all England began to hope once more.

It was a fine day at the end of February, and Lady Glengarvon was out driving with her nurse, having left Constance to write a long letter to Lawyer Morris and another to the bailiff, the directions for which she had dictated early in the morning. Constance had just finished, when the man of the house, who acted as butler, announced Mr. Vivian.

Constance rose to meet him, and handed her letters to the landlord.

“Hard at work, eh?”

“Yes, I have not been out to-day. That always makes me feel weary.”

“The baroness out?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, then, pray stay here! I so seldom see you alone. It keeps me in a perpetual state of irritation to feel I cannot have a word with you uninterrupted by some bore. You look

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pale. I am not sure how I like you best, with or without roses. You work hard for an unpaid *attaché*."

"No, not really hard. I wish I knew *how* to work."

"Why? Do you think your aunt may cut you off with a shilling? Don't be afraid. She has promised *me* to make a fresh will, under my supervision, and I promise you shall not be forgotten."

"You are very good to me, Rex. You must not think I am greedy for money. A very little will suffice for me; only, I am a helpless creature. I could not earn anything, and to be penniless and dependent will be horrible!"

"Much too horrible for you," he returned, leaning on the top of a high-backed chair facing her as she stood on the hearth-rug, holding her right hand, which had been chilled with long writing, to the fire, her face slightly turned from his steady gaze. "Besides, you have resources."

"Resources! I should like to know what they are," laughing.

"You can come and keep house for me. You know I am going to buy a town mansion."

"Keep house! Me? I should soon be dismissed with ignominy."

"Then come and be the most precious thing it. God, Constance, why do you shrink from me? You know, you must know, how I hunger and thirst for you! You have bewitched me ever since I found you were a woman capable of love! No, I will not ask to keep your hand! I am mad enough to govern myself! You have tormented me till at times I—I hated you! Why will you not let yourself love me?"

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"But, Rex, forgive me for saying it, I am not inclined to love you. Indeed, I am not. I am grateful——"

"Bah!" he interrupted. "Don't offer me a stone when I ask for bread. You resist the tendency of your own nature to reciprocate the passion you have inspired. Why do you fear me in a way you cannot conceal? Because you fear for yourself, for your own constancy to that boy, that young soldier——"

"No. No, indeed! I do try to forget him. I should have quite succeeded but for the notion of the danger into which I have driven him. And you, Rex, how can you wish to marry a girl who has loved, who perhaps still loves another?"

Vivian laughed harshly. "Because I have no special aspiration for a virgin heart. Because I feel you are a woman of honour, who would suffer the tortures of the damned rather than disgrace the name you bore. Let me help you to forget. Give yourself to me; take me for your lover, your husband, and I will drive these dreams from your heart, your mind, from whatever dreams, by the intensity of the passion, the tenderness, I have for you. Let yourself go, Constance. You are a proud, strong woman. But there is fire in your veins, and I must, I will kindle it! Give yourself to me, be my wife, and then however unjustly your aunt may treat you, your future will be above all doubt and difficulty, Constance." He caught both her hands in his and pressed them against his heart, and its strong throbbing, which she could not help feeling, completed the sense of alarm, of consternation not untinged by sympathy, which bewildered her.

"Rex, I do not know what to say. You surprise, you

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overwhelm me ! I cannot answer you. I thought you liked me partly from pity, that you liked to tease ; but——”

“You must have known my feelings for you were deeper and stronger than that. I had determined to be patient, to win you, before I spoke of all I desired, all I pined for ; but I could not keep back the words. You are in some ways stronger than I am. Come, Constance, banish the past. Let me lead you into a new world. See, I will not be inconsiderate. I will not press for an irrevocable consent. But try to love me, or let yourself love me. Let us be only friends for a while,—a month, six weeks. I’ll do my best not to make love to you ; I will, indeed. And then I will try my luck once more. Is not this fair ? But, Constance, one kiss, just as an earnest of good will. You might give me one.”

“Oh, no, no, Rex ! I could not. I should despise myself. And am I fit to accept your generous offer when my heart is still full of another ? Another, who may now be lying dead where I drove him. Oh, put me out of your thoughts ! I do not think I could ever marry you, Rex. I am curiously afraid of you, and I have a sort of belief that you would tire of me. Besides, you disturb me in a strange manner. You make my heart beat. You make me vain, and—oh ! I cannot tell you how extraordinary the influence is which you have upon me !”

“I can wait,” said Vivian, in a low deep tone. “You give me hope. Try to forget this outbreak of mine. Be just, and see that in seeking my own happiness I want to secure yours. I shall be your friend and adopted kinsman for the next few months, but remember, under that seeming I am

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your lover,—a lover, too, that is determined to win you, cost what it may. What an enormous debt of torment you will have to pay off when I have succeeded !”

“You seem very sure of success, Rex,” she exclaimed, smiling, glad to escape from the sultriness which seemed to envelop them into a more breezy atmosphere. “Are you not too self-reliant ?”

“There’s that in your eyes which compels me to hope and dare everything. Then you agree to take me on trial as a possible *fiancé* ?”

“No—no—no, Rex ! Do not think that we are *both* quite free. Remember——” The door opened to admit Mrs. Quentin and her little daughter.

“Oh, Rex ! I thought you were going down to Easthorpe to-day ?”

“Yes, I am ; but by a late train.”

“Well, Constance, do you think you could get leave to dine with us and come to the Olympic after ? Mrs. Stirling is playing there, and——”

“Yes, I should like to go,” interrupted Constance. “I will ask my aunt as soon as she comes in. She really does not want me.”

“Has she been long out ?”

“About an hour and a half. She will soon be here now.”

“Then I shall wait.”

Here Hilda began to question her uncle about various old-fashioned prints which hung the——

He replied by very fanciful explanations, till suddenly interrupting himself he addressed his sister,—

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"Thank you, Louisa ; I shall be very happy to dine with you to-day, and to accompany you to the theatre afterwards."

"But, Rex, I did not ask you !"

"No ; but you meant to do so, and I have accepted the un-uttered invitation."

"I thought you were going to visit your constituents."

"That will do another day. They are a sleepy, contented, uncomplaining lot, and one day is the same as another to them."

"I have sometimes wondered you did not try for some more important place."

"I did not want a more important place. I have qualified for entrance to the House. *In* it I consider I represent Europe. Foreign affairs shall be my care, and the Foreign Office my goal."

"Not a bad idea. Well, Rex, I shall be glad to see you at dinner. Oh, here is Lady Glengarvon ! She is looking better, Constance." Looking out of the window as the carriage drew up.

"She is very variable, and never quite happy here. The doctor will be obliged to let her go home before long or the remedy will be worse than the disease."

Vivian went away to offer the invalid his arm, and Constance left the room, that Mrs. Quentin might ask permission for the evening's *congé* in her absence. This was graciously accorded.

* * * * *

The interview just described had greatly disturbed Constance. She had always felt that Vivian was attracted to her, but that he was seriously in love with her was quite another

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view of the matter. She fancied he was rather unscrupulous in seeking for amusement, and for a considerable time after he had become really in earnest she thought he still laughed at her. She was conscious, however, that he exerted a strong and not altogether agreeable influence upon her. In his presence she never thought of Alan Musgrave ; she became occupied rather with herself. Was Vivian mocking or admiring her ? Was she acting sensibly or like a fool ? were usually the questions which addressed themselves to her unless, indeed, some subject which touched or interested her was started, when self was soon forgotten, and she spoke naturally out of the fulness of her heart. But besides this uncertainty, Vivian's glances and tones could set her pulses throbbing and thrill her with a curious sense of fear and helplessness, which she dreaded, though it was not without a dash of pleasure. Now he had put all she had ever dimly imagined into words, into more than words, when the tones in which they were spoken were taken into account, she felt more afraid of him than ever, though touched with a degree of sympathy for feelings evidently strong and real. He knew, and he was right, that he had acquired a strong hold upon her, and she recognised with some degree of shame that if she did not keep guard over herself some barrier, something she knew not what, would break down and Rex would sweep her away on the tide of his own passion. " Even if I could marry him, I should not be happy. I am sure I should not. He would weary of me, and then he could be cruel." Then the memory of her first love, his boyish tenderness, his almost brotherly affection, his self-restraint, yet undisguised adoration of her. How different was her perfect trust in him, her

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tranquil happiness when with him, to the feverish pride in having conquered Rex Vivian's half-contemptuous, mocking spirit, the unrest which was not all pain when she felt how she drew him to her side as if by unconscious magnetic force !

"Yet Rex is fond of me. And how angry Aunt Elizabeth would be if she knew I had refused him ! Not that I seem to have altered matters much. It is not easy to put Rex's intentions aside. He seems to have made up his mind to marry me. I wonder if he will ? But I am not quite a baby ; I will have something to say in the matter. Does he know how found I am still of Alan ? Where is my dear love, my playfellow, now ? Still in comparative safety, or dead ? or wounded and suffering, without help or comfort ?"

She sat down and gave herself up to an uncontrollable fit of weeping, till the entrance of Barbara, who came to dress her for dinner, roused her to some attempt at self-mastery.

"Dear, dear Miss Constance ! how will you ever get your eyes right in time ! You must bathe them well first in warm, then in cold water. Then perhaps a little rose-water. You have had no bad news, miss, I hope ?"

"Oh, no, no, Barbara ! I have only been thinking."

Barbara's efforts were fairly successful, and Constance's appearance attracted no particular attention, except that in leaving the theatre Vivian, on whose arm she leant, said in a low voice, "You have been making yourself miserable and crying your eyes out, Constance. Is it sorrow for one lover or dread of the other ?"

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CHAPTER XV.

ON the whole, Vivian was not dissatisfied with the state of affairs. The refusal of Constance did not count as a real obstacle. He was rather disgusted with himself for having shown his hand so soon. "I ought to have given her more rope," he thought. "She is a delicate, difficult subject. I did not think that young soldier would be so formidable a rival. Bad shots those Hindoo ruffians must be or he would not be above-ground now. Perhaps he would be even more formidable in his grave? Still, I have certain chances. Constance is a real live woman, and some strain in her nature responds to the fire of mine. She has variety, too. I shall make a most excellent husband; at any rate, for a considerable time."

"Dr. Chaldecott, sir," said the valet, breaking in on the current of his thoughts.

"Chaldecott!" cried Vivian; "you are infinitely welcome. Sit down." He was at breakfast. "Fresh coffee and eggs, Rogers!" to his valet. "What has brought you across the Channel?"

"Business," returned Chaldecott, shaking hands cordially with his host. "I have come to interview the maternal parent of another delicate boy, and if she approves, to escort him back to my abode at Passy. In short, I am doing very well. This is the fourth inmate I have acquired in a year and a half, and for some time I shall not want another."

"It must be an awful bore having these hobbledehoyes about your house."

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"Well, no. Of course, I do not take any who are really weak in intellect; only backward, delicate boys. I find my wife a great help. She makes the place homelike to the poor devils, and then I have a nice young French tutor, who knows English. Altogether, the undertaking works very well, and the pay is right good."

"Very glad to hear it. And your patient-in-chief?"

"Physically, there is a marvellous improvement. I believe he'll live to a hundred."

Vivian laughed. "I hope madam is well, and the youngster? Is it a boy?"

"Thank you, my wife and daughter are quite well. The former hopes you will soon visit Paris again," returned Chaldecott. Then the conversation turned on public matters,—the state of affairs in India and other topics.

"I was sorry to hear of Lady Glengarvon's accident," said Chaldecott presently. "I suppose she is all right again?"

"Well, no. She has not recovered as one might have expected. Sir William Harley, who is attending her, fears that creeping paralysis has set in, in consequence of some hitherto unsuspected injury to the spine. I must say I am greatly concerned for her; but specially for Constance Morton, who will have a bad time of it, at least for a while."

"True! And how is my charming friend Miss Morton?"

"Oh, well, exceedingly well. She seems to have superb health, which is a beauty in itself. She has blossomed out into a delightful woman. By the way, I may mention in confidence that I am going to marry her."

"Oh, indeed! So you have made up your mind to that sacrifice."

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"Sacrifice!" repeated Vivian, laughing. "My dear fellow, I am ready to move heaven and earth to compass the union to-morrow."

"This is a metamorphose. How do you account for it?"

"There are one or two reasons. Chiefly, because I see the struggle between her desire to keep up the old dislike to me and the inclination of her riper nature to love even as she is loved! No,"—interrupting himself,—“not exactly. There can be few women capable of the intense passion I feel for this obstinate girl! She refused me rather decidedly about ten days ago; but that is only the opening chapter. I hope she is not going to give me too much trouble. A dash of revenge would be a bad ingredient in the crucible where the molten metal of my love for her is seething."

Chaldecott looked rather grave. "If you are so fortunate as to win the young lady, Mr. Vivian, I trust you will make her a good, kind, steady husband."

"So do I," thoughtfully. "At any rate, she will be better off with me than with most men. At present she is a penniless pensioner on her aunt's bounty. As my wife, even when the force and fervor of my present state are over,—and you and I know it cannot last,—she is sure of a life of ease, distinction, refinement. Her son will be a peer of the realm, and the doors of the best, really best, society will open wide for her. These are consolations, Chaldecott."

"I doubt if they would console Constance Morton for change in a husband *if* she loved him."

"Unreasonable creatures women are," returned Vivian, laughing lightly. "Take some more *pâté de foie gras*?"

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some coffee? No? Then let us go through your last quarter's accounts. I suppose you have brought them."

"Yes, of course; I prefer speaking to writing on these topics."

"So do I, considerably. By the way, Chaldecott, I am developing a fine taste for accumulation. I feel what an enormous power money is now that I have some. I sold that old barrack in Portland Place, sold it well, and I have been gambling with the money ever since. I have been successful, too. I have nearly doubled my original stakes and invested my gains in good solid stock, beginning again with the original sum. I am fortunate in having a capital stock-broker, and I have left all my business in the hands of poor Tom's lawyers."

"It was probably wiser," said Chaldecott.

They now rose from table and passed into an adjoining study or writing-room, simply but luxuriously furnished, as were all the rooms in Vivian's convenient chambers in the Albany. And for an hour or more they studied various accounts and papers which Chaldecott produced from an inner pocket, discussing many points as they proceeded.

"You are a capital manager, Chaldecott," said Vivian, when they seemed to have exhausted the subject. "I must say of the many good turns my patron Old Nick has done me of late, your friendship and help have been about the best."

"Well, yours have been lucky to me." There was a pause, and Vivian took up the *Times*.

"There doesn't seem much fresh news to-day," he said. "No letter from 'our own correspondent.' Fancy what old

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Wellington would have said if they had sent him a 'war correspondent' to Torres Vedras, for instance."

"I think I know what he would have done. Hung him up *pour encourager les autres*."

"There is a private letter, or part of one, that seems interesting. It's from some fellow that was shut up in the residency at Jehadpore, where they made such a capital stand against the Pandies." And he read: "'Particulars of the Siege, from one of the Defenders of Jehadpore Residency—Extract of Letter.'

"'I must now give you some account of the siege. We had, of course, a very uneasy time of it for some months; but things looked quiet enough till the beginning of November, when the commandant at M—— sent up a company of Rifles not only to overawe the N. I. regiments, but to defend the Nawaub should his people turn rusty.

"'The commissioner was rather seedy, having had a nasty attack of fever, after which he ought to have gone to the hills, but at such a time that was out of the question. As disaffection spread, we ceased to get letters or news of any kind, except from the neighbourhood, or the bazaar, and this was one of the most trying circumstances of our situation.

"'When the Rifles came in they were placed in cantonments alongside the two native regiments, which were always stationed at the other side of the town. One of them was supposed to be rather mutinous in temper, and the commissioner, who was disposed to take a desponding view of things owing to his state of health, and was naturally uneasy about his wife, ordered various preparations which the assistant commander and myself considered quite unnecessary,—

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i.e., quantities of bags were filled with sand and stored under the verandahs, flour, rice, provisions, ammunition, were collected, and no end of things done, which showed that our chief thought bad times were at hand. It is well for us he did.

“ ‘Then came the beginning of troubles. The Nawaub, who was a sleepy, peaceful old boy, had a young rascal of a nephew, who was well known to be determined on supplanting his uncle. The present state of affairs offered him a chance, so he headed a sudden outbreak against us, when the whole of the Sixth and Eighth native infantry, with about twenty or thirty exceptions, suddenly attacked the Rifles, who, most fortunately, were assembling for parade. A desperate fight ensued. At the outset of which Captain Wood, commanding the Rifles, fell, shot through the heart. Our people retreated in fairly good order, notwithstanding a heavy loss, to the residency grounds, which are surrounded by a high brick wall. We all rushed, of course, out to do what we could, the servants standing by us.

“ ‘While a party of the Rifles kept up a brisk fire on the Pandies we made as good a barricade as we could behind the strong iron gates of the commissioner's carriage and some carts, etc., from which we removed the wheels.

“ ‘By the time this was finished and our soldiers sheltered behind it, poor Lieutenant Johnson, the only remaining officer with the Rifles, was severely wounded and carried senseless into the house. Then the siege began. We mustered in all about seventy-five men,—forty Rifles, the loyal Sepoys (who deserve great credit for leaving their comrades), the servants, and the officials of the residency.

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“ ‘The first want that stared us in the face was serious enough,—the want of a commander. Wood shot, Johnson disabled, the commissioner a splendid fellow, but a civilian, everything devolved on a young sergeant of the Rifles, who had already seen some service, and proved himself to be a thorough soldier.

“ ‘Our chances lay, first, in the absence of big guns on the enemy's side, in superior marksmanship on ours, and the small circuit of the building to be defended. Our weak points were the small garrison, the large attacking force, and the house and the well which supplied it. Fortunately, this well was sheltered by a stout erection of brick, which also contained a large plunge-bath. Sergeant Musgrave’ (‘Note the name,’ said Vivian, interrupting himself), ‘Sergeant Musgrave's first act was to open a deep trench between the house and the bath-place, along either side of which he raised a rampart of sand-bags two feet high, which concealed those passing to and fro. Then a rampart of sand-bags was placed round the roof and on the verandahs, till every old sack in the place, and those which had brought rice, flour, etc., were used up.

“ ‘Luckily the Sepoys, delighted with their own prowess, had retired to hold high jinks in the town, thinking they had us safely, like rats in a trap; and even next day there were but slight attempts to molest us. We settled down to a regular routine.

“ ‘The commissioner took command of the commissariat, assisted by his kamsamah. They dealt out the rations, which were limited, for provisions were not too abundant. Lloyd, the assistant commissioner, and myself were ranked among

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the combatants, both being pretty good shots. Musgrave divided his men into watches, as our safety depended on a sharp lookout from the roof. Every head which appeared above the surrounding wall receiving instant attention, and when a number showed simultaneously, the reserve, who were below, rushed up and turned the dropping shots into deadly volleys. Twice a large number managed to rush up to the entrance, but a brisk fire through the loop-holes left between the sand-bags thinned them, and a hand-to-hand struggle on the steps drove them off. It is not easy to convey to you the all-pervading activity of Musgrave. I suppose he slept, but when it would puzzle any one to say. He was always cool, grave, indeed, gentle in manner. The women—Mrs. Everard, her sister, and their respective ayahs—could not make enough of him. I must say the young fellow is a gentleman, and evidently an educated man.

“‘All this time no word reached us from without. Some letters which the commissioner had written just before we were shut up must have reached the officer in command at M——.’

“‘There’s a lot more,’” said Vivian, breaking off. Then he went on skimming it. “‘Poor devils! what a time they must have had with desperate sorties to bury the dead left within the enclosure, the dread of their ammunition running short, the sickening delay of expected help! Every one seems to have behaved right well, the women splendidly. This horrible suspense went on for fourteen days. Then Herbert’s levy—a sort of irregular cavalry—came to the rescue, and beat Pandey, re-establishing order, and then started Everard and his womenkind off homewards. Here’s the end: ‘Unfortu-

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nately, the last shot fired in this memorable business wounded Musgrave. Mortally, it was at first feared; but with great care the doctor pulled him through, and I am told he is coming round. He is a sort of man we can ill spare, and he has a fine career before him.'

"I should think he had," continued Vivian, handing the paper to Dr. Chaldecott. "It was a lucky hit for him,—this residency business. Mrs. Everard is a niece of the commander-in-chief, and for pertinacious puffing there's nothing like a woman friend. Do you know who this Musgrave is? He is the son of one of Lady Glengarvon's tenants,—a farmer of the better class, who gave his sons a good education. This young fellow was being brought up to the law, when he suddenly gave them the slip and enlisted. Got into some scrape, I suppose, though nothing ever came out."

"Well, luck is with him. Men in the ranks occasionally have the chance of distinguishing themselves by acts of simple daring; but to have an opportunity of showing judgment, generalship, is rare indeed."

"This lad's luck will keep him in India," remarked Vivian, thoughtfully. "I suppose he is sure of his commission."

"No doubt. Now I want to do a hundred and fifty things, so must leave you. May I call on Lady Glengarvon? I should like to see Miss Morton again."

"What! are you smitten too? I shall forbid the interview," returned Vivian, laughing.

"Oh, I am doubly guarded,—by matrimony and friendship."

"Guarded!" repeated Vivian. "Do you think any barrier can keep out the rising tide of a real strong passion?"

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"I hope so," returned the doctor, "if you begin to stem it early enough."

Vivian laughed. "Go about your business, old man," he said; "but meet me at Véry's one-thirty sharp. We'll lunch together, and I'll go with you to see Constance after. If Lady Glengarvon shows up, take a good look at her; I think she is in a bad way."

"If in the course of a year you win the wife you want and inherit the rank and additional riches you expect, you, too, will be a lucky fellow."

"All things come to him who dares," said Vivian. "The secret of success lies in two words,—Be Bold."

* * * * *

The details of the gallant defence made by a handful of defenders against such odds in the Defence of Jehadpore Residency were read by many with vivid interest and patriotic pride; but in a few loving hearts they roused overwhelming emotion, and Mr. Musgrave, of Ravenscroft Farm, was a proud man next market-day when his friends and neighbours crowded round him with congratulations and praises.

"Ay, ay. The lad showed them huythens 'twas small use to worry a Northshire tyke."

"Hey, man! your boy has the real old border blood in his veins."

"He'll be an officer afore you can look round ye, Mr. Musgrave; and mayhaps dining wi' Her Majesty when he comes home."

"An' she might have worse company, Mr. Jenkins," returned the father. "Why, he is a commissioned officer *now*! His friend Mr. Everard, whom he saved with all the rest,

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wrote himself to-day that Alan has joined Herbert's horse, as they found he could ride,—ride like a Northshire man. He's Lieutenant Musgrave, if you please, and getting well of his wound, thank God. So if you'll do me the honour we'll drink his health in a bumper or two at the 'Glengarvon Arms.'” A suggestion loudly approved and abundantly carried out.

But the most tenderly exultant of all was the mother as she sat in her place at church,—the church where the boy had been christened, to which he had so often trotted by her side in his childhood's days, and where in the fading light of a summer's evening he had sat through the brief exhortation with which the rector usually closed the Sabbath services, his hand in hers, while the tears welled from her sad eyes, knowing that to-morrow he would go forth perhaps never to return. And now the rector, in his sermon, made mention of “a member of this congregation who had done honour to his upbringing, to his county, to his people, and the faith in which he had been reared.” Yes, that was a glorious day to the fond mother. Her boy, her unacknowledged favourite, had already made himself a name,—had ascended three or four rings of life's ladder at a bound. Ah, if she could only see him !

When Vivian and his ally reached Lady Glengarvon's abode, that lady was in the drawing-room and received them. She was very gracious to both, and explained that, as the weather was cold and the wind east, she had not gone out. “They seem afraid of my taking cold,” she said. “Now that is a thing I never did ; of course, latterly, I have been obliged to coddle myself, but I am getting better, decidedly better.”

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Chaldecott, gazing at her yellowish wrinkled skin and dull but restless eyes, formed his own opinion, but continued to converse with her, asking some questions about Glengarvon, which she answered with abundant details and accounts of the plans she had made respecting various improvements there, about which she spoke profusely and eagerly.

"Constance!" said Vivian, going over to the window, where she had retreated with what he termed her "everlasting knitting" when she saw that Chaldecott was absorbed by her aunt. "Constance, look at me!"

He was immediately obeyed, and for once her eyes met his fully, unflinchingly.

They were full of light, as if reflecting some day-spring in her heart, but steady and fearless; her cheeks were unusually colourless, and a faint smile, or rather the shadow of a smile, parted her lips. Her face was full of strength and tenderness, and as he looked a sudden, wild thrill of passionate admiration shivered through Vivian's frame.

"Well?" asked Constance, after waiting in vain for him to speak.

"Constance," he repeated, drawing a chair opposite her, "you have been reading the *Times* this morning."

"I have, Rex," she said, and a smile so sweet, so happy, beamed in her eyes that he felt himself most fully answered.

There was a brief pause. Then Vivian, in a very frank and friendly tone, remarked, "I must congratulate you. It is always pleasant to find one's preference justified by circumstances or, rather, conduct. Memory, under this rising sun of success, is keener than ever."

"Memory is always equally vivid," said Constance, softly;

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"but my heart is so much lighter to think that I have sent him 'to high fortune' instead of hardship and an obscure death, that I could embrace the whole world."

"Would to Heaven we were in the Glengarvon woods, that I might take advantage of your benevolent impulse! But, Constance, do you not admire my generosity in sympathising with you in what is really unfavourable to me?"

"I do not know that I quite understand you, Rex," she said, the colour overspreading the rich pallor of her face. "But my old playfellow would be more present with me in failure than in success."

"How am I to understand that, Constance?" in a low, earnest tone. "Do you mean that Musgrave, marching in the ranks to a mere good-service pension, or his share in a common trench dug on the battle-field, is a more formidable rival than Musgrave belauded in the *Times* and sporting Her Majesty's commission?"

"Yes, Rex," slowly. "I think he would be."

"May he go on and prosper! Then, by the time he is a captain, which in these topsy-turvy days he may be in another year, he may have passed out of your field of vision."

"And I from his," she returned, with a far-away look in her eyes.

"Oh, most likely! He will marry some rich Begum, get into the Council, and come sailing homeward on the crest of the waves with a heavy purse and the ghost of a liver when he is about sixty."

Constance shook her head, but did not reply.

"What are you going to do to-night?" continued Vivian. "You are a perfect prisoner in these stuffy rooms. One

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never catches a glimpse of you of an evening. There is a dance on at Lady Jane Bonham's to-night. I know Louisa is going. Let me arrange with her to take you. It is only a matter of sending a note. I'll go, too, and we'll have a dance together. By Jove! I haven't danced for ten years, but I do not think I should tread on your feet or lose you in the ruck of the dancers. What do you say?"

Constance thought for a moment.

"It seems rather frivolous; but I should like to go. Only I—I do not think I have a dress fit to go in."

"Oh, nonsense! You have till ten or eleven o'clock to-night. Barbara or some one will make something fit to be seen in. Go and ask her. Forgive this urgency, but I have an extraordinary desire to—to dance with you to-night. Come, be good-natured. Go and consult the accomplished Barbara."

Constance hesitated, then rose, and noiselessly left the room.

Rex Vivian also rose and stood in the window, looking far away, and really seeing Lady Jane's rooms, and he himself, his arm round Constance, guiding her through the crowded dance, perhaps in her present mood winning a promise from her which he would take care should be promptly fulfilled.

But Constance soon returned. "What's the verdict?" asked Vivian.

"I think I have a garment that some alteration may make fit to wear; but it is very simple and by no means new-fashioned. So if I look shabby——"

"Shabby! Nature forbids the applicability of that epithet, my——" an instant's pause, and he added in a whisper, "my queen!"

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"Hush!" she returned in the same low tone. "If I am to go, Rex, you must ask Aunt Elizabeth. She never says no to you."

His reply was to put the question immediately.

"A dance at the Bonhams'?" cried the baroness. "Are you going, Rex?"

"Yes, of course, I am."

"Oh, very well. Perhaps you had better go, Constance. Don't let her stay late. I depend on you, Rex, to make her be prudent. I am thinking of going down to Bournemouth, or, rather, I am being sent there, to while away the time till it is warm enough to get away to Glengarvon, and once I am *there* I will never leave it again. So it would not do for Constance to take cold or anything and interfere with my journey."

"Why not leave your unpaid *attaché* with the Quentins? She will not then interfere with you, and those misguided people will be delighted to put her up."

To this Lady Glengarvon demurred, for no particular reason, and suddenly cut the conversation short by ringing for nurse, declaring she was tired. She took her arm and left the room, promising Vivian that she would think about leaving Constance with Mrs. Quentin.

Then Dr. Chaldecott enjoyed a pleasant chat with his friend Miss Morton, who asked many questions about his little girl, and seemed full of kindly interest in himself.

Vivian, however, did not give his chum much time, as he wanted to go on to D— Street, whither he invited Chaldecott to accompany him.

"Miss Morton has, indeed, blossomed as a rose," he exclaimed, as they crossed into the park. "There is a high-

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bred simplicity, a cordial kindliness in her manner, quite fascinating. You *are* a lucky fellow! And how handsome she has grown since those days, how long ago, when she used to seem both shy and sullen! I suspect *you* have had your share in working the miracle."

Vivian shook his head. "And Lady Glengarvon?" he asked.

"I do not like her looks. It strikes me she won't 'stop the way' or *your* way long."

"And I wish to gratify her by marrying her niece while she is still here to see," replied Vivian.

CHAPTER XVI.

"BARBARA'S ACCOUNT."

It was a weary time, those months in London, I must say. If one could have seen my lady improving, I should not have minded so much; but though she sometimes did seem a bit better, I did not like the look of things for many reasons.

The nurse (and I confess I was terribly vexed when I heard we were to have a fine lady of that description landed in the house), she turned out not half as bad as I expected. I do respect women who mind their business and don't waste time talking for talking's sake. At first she never spoke to me. Then she would just say "Good-night" and "Good-morning." Next she would ask a few questions about my lady's health, and how she used to be before her accident. So by degrees we grew quite friendly. I found she hated

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ladies' maids; she had met some bad specimens, I fancy. One day, after she had been over two months in the house with us, she said she thought me a sensible, industrious girl, which showed me she had a good deal of penetration. Ah! we are all ready to drink in flattery. At any rate, I have been, too ready.

The only person I care to talk long with, or nearly the only one, is my dear young lady. She doesn't talk about herself, only now and again she often told me of what she read, and sometimes of the wonderful things she thought, till the world seemed a different place to me. Who the other person I loved to talk to was—it's no matter now. It would have been better for me if—but it's time enough to write about that.

Miss Constance kept very steady to her care of my lady. She read to her and wrote for her, and went out very little. When she did, it was either with Mrs. Quentin or Mr. Vivian. Though she never said much about him, I could not help expecting every day to hear she was engaged to him.

Nothing seemed to interest her so much as the newspapers. She used to tell me all she read about the fighting in India, and awful it was how those cruel heathen murdered and cut up the women and poor innocent children, and how our men grew like fiends in their revenge, which one couldn't wonder at.

I shall never forget one Thursday about the very last in February, a chill, dreary morning, when Miss Constance came into her room. I was dusting it, for a lodging-house servant's idea of doing a lady's room is curious, and no wonder, poor soul!

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"Are you there, Barbara?" she cried, and something in her voice made me turn round quick. She was standing by the dressing-table with a newspaper in her hand, her big beautiful eyes all alight, looking as if the sun shone in her heart. "Oh, Barbara! I have found such wonderful news here. My aunt has gone out, and—— Shut the door,—sit down. I will read it all to you!" she cried.

"Let me put a match to the fire, miss; you'll be chilled here."

"Chilled!" she repeated, with such a sweet joyous laugh. "I am glowing all through. Listen." So she began, and read a lot. How some English men and women were shut up in a house and surrounded by these dreadful mutineers, all the officers were killed, and nobody left to give orders except the sergeant, and who should he be but young Mr. Musgrave. It was all so wonderful and described so life-like that I couldn't help crying, but Miss Constance was as firm as a rock. So now Musgrave is made an officer, and fit to sit down with Her Majesty.

Of course we talked and talked, and I said something about its being so surprising, but my dear young lady said softly, as if out of her thoughts, "I am *not* surprised. I always knew how wise and strong and thoughtful Alan is. He was always full of resource. All he wanted was opportunity, and Heaven has sent him this. He has proved himself; he will rise high. I must write to Mrs. Musgrave, and, Barbara, you must buy me a copy of the *Times*. I will send it to Alan's father. They will all forgive him now."

It seemed to me that this grand news would very likely spoil Mr. Vivian's game, and I had set my heart on Miss

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Constance being Lady Glengarvon and ruling in the old place where she was treated like a beggar and left without decent clothes. So I made bold to say, "But I suppose, miss, all this means that Mr. Musgrave can't leave where he is if he's to make the most of his good fortune?"

"Exactly," she said, folding up the paper. "It would never do to leave India, except for health's sake, and you see he is recovering from his wound. No, I should be sorry if he were to return now. It is quite possible we may never meet again, but I can bear that if I am sure I have not injured him, rather sent him out to win place and fame. I am so thankful, Barbara, that I am ready to devote the rest of my life to duty in gratitude to God. Perhaps this may help to bring him still more good fortune. It is sweet to sacrifice oneself for those one loves! I feel at peace with all the world."

She looked like a bright, strong angel. Then she sat down and wrote a short letter, which was addressed to Mrs. Musgrave, and tied up the paper. Next she took out her little purse and opened it.

"It's the end of the month, Barbara, and I have only eighteen pence left of my pocket-money. Here is a shilling. Buy the *Times* of to-day and stamps. Do it soon. You know Aunt Elizabeth has the papers counted. It is a little craze. I think she is fonder of me than she used to be."

"If she wasn't," said I, all in a hurry, "she is as great a heathen as those black villains across the sea."

"What an extraordinary test of my poor aunt's Christianity!" she said, laughing. "But, Barbara, you must not speak in that way again." Then she went and looked in the

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glass, and made her hair smooth ; it looked as if she had rumbled her hair. Leaning her head on her hands presently, as if speaking to her own image, she said, "I wonder what Rex Vivian will say ; for, of course, he will know all about it. He knows everything, and seems able to do everything. He affects me very strangely. I always partly dread his presence. Yet when he does not come I miss him. He seems able to do what he likes. I begin to think he will marry me in spite of myself."

"And I am sure you might do much worse, miss, if you will forgive me for venturing to say so. He is a real fine gentleman, as any lady might be proud of, and rich and handsome——"

"No, Barbara, not really handsome. I have seen Mr. Vivian look ugly, as if he would not hesitate at wrong-doing ; that is what repels me more than anything else, the feeling that he would not hesitate at anything to gain what he set his heart on."

"Well, miss, a man that isn't a bit masterful ain't a man at all."

"Masterful !" she repeated. "That is different." And with that she rose up and went away, nor did I hear more of her till the afternoon. I was putting away some lace I had washed for my lady when I heard Miss Constance calling me. I ran down to meet her.

"Barbara," she said, "have I any dress fit to put on if I were to go to a dance to-night ?"

"Well, miss, there's your pearl satin, with the French lace. It wouldn't take much to make it fit to be seen. The sleeves must be bunched up a bit. Are you going out, miss ?"

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"Yes,—that is, perhaps. Can you get it ready for me by eight or nine o'clock this evening?"

"Yes, sure, miss; I could do two in the time."

"Thank you," she said, with a nod and a smile, and away she went back to the drawing-room.

I had plenty to do for the rest of the day, and at dinner-time, when everything was laid out, I could not find a fresh pair of gloves, so I just ran out and bought a pair, nice and fresh, and my dear young lady never knew that they were not a pair from last year. I always enjoyed dressing her, and didn't she pay for dressing!

There was some little fuss about getting a card, but Mr. Vivian took it in hand and made it all right.

Mrs. Quentin called for Miss Constance after my lady had settled for the night, and I offered to sit up, as it was my duty to do. So I made up the fire, took a warm shawl, and lay down on the sofa in the drawing-room.

I seemed to have had a good night's rest when I roused up at some noise and heard the knocker going. Remembering everything in a minute, I ran downstairs and opened the door. Mr. Vivian, in a loose overcoat and a soft hat pulled down on his brow, was handing my young lady out of the carriage. I fancied there was a triumphant air about him. He followed her up the steps, and she paused before she crossed the threshold to bid him good-night. His eyes gleamed from under the shadow of his hat as he held her hand in both his own for a moment and said,—

"To-morrow, then, at half-past two. Get to rest quickly. Sleep well, my queen!" He spoke very low and softly. I did not think his voice could have sounded so soft and

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tender, but I heard clear enough and thought it was all right.

Miss Constance walked straight upstairs into the drawing-room, where there was a bright bit of fire, for it was a cold night, and I kept it up, as my lady would allow no fires in the bedrooms. So I turned up the gas and said, "If you will sit down, Miss Constance, I will take the pins out of your hair, here by the fire, and I brought down a wrapper to throw over your dress." She made no sort of an answer, but stood quite still by the table, slowly drawing off her gloves and stretching them out, her eyes gazing far away as if she neither heard nor saw what was going on. I waited. Suddenly she gave me a start and seemed to come to herself. "My hair? Oh, yes! Thank you, Barbara; you are always kind and thoughtful."

I set a chair for her, but she took no notice, and began to walk up and down slowly. I stood looking at her, and thinking how she had changed from the silent, depressed, shabby young creature I had first seen, so slim and straight and shapeless, to the lovely young lady before me, in her shimmering pearly satin, her beautiful white shoulders so smooth and graceful,—evening dresses were cut very low on the shoulders then,—her rich colour. The more colour she had the better she looked, and she had more than usual that evening, making her eyes like two stars, her nut-brown hair coiled low on her neck and a lot more twisted into a coronet across the top of her head. The way she moved, the look of life, of warmth, of kindness, that was both in face and figure,—it may be foolish, but I think figure has its expression as well as face,—I said to myself it was no wonder Mr. Vivian was far gone about her, and he was. No one could see him in the

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same room with her and have any doubt about it. But my dear young lady sat down suddenly on a low chair, and, clasping her hands round her knee, sighed deeply.

"I hope you had a pleasant evening, miss?"

"Yes, Barbara," she said, looking straight into the fire. "Rather too pleasant. I fear I lost my head a little and was rather weak and foolish."

"That's not like you, Miss Constance," I said. "Shall I take down your hair?"

"Yes." She lifted her arms and I put on the loose wrapper. So I began to take down her hair. Presently she said, "There was a great crowd,—it was more a ball than a simple dance. The music was lovely,—such sweet, sad, dreamy waltzes as they played. They made me feel strangely, dizzy, half melancholy, half fascinated. Then I had such a good partner! You cannot think how well Mr. Vivian dances. I wonder he never went to any dances when I was in town last year." Then she stopped and thought a bit. "I don't think I was quite myself after that first waltz. Mr. Vivian introduced one or two other men to me, but he put down his own name on my card for nearly every waltz, and when I did dance with others I longed for him to come back. Such a load had been lifted off my mind by the news of this morning that I felt at once proud and joyous and vain. I knew I looked well, and though Rex spoke very little, he contrived to convey the impression that he had given his whole soul to me,—that he hung upon my words. At one time I sat down to rest in a conservatory while a gallop was going on, and he spoke so delightfully of Alan Musgrave. He said his career was sure; that he did credit to my instinctive penetration; that he would

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rise to the highest rank, *but* that he must marry a rich wife ; for want of money would always be a serious hindrance, and said he was sure I would not wish to hold him back from full success. As he spoke, I felt as if I should not mind Alan's marrying some one else. Rex has always of late affected me curiously, but this evening, when I saw how desperately in earnest he was, I felt so elated to think of the contemptuous teasing, which was all the attention he used to bestow on me, and that now I held him in my hand, I could not help laughing and teasing *him*.

"Then he said such wild, extraordinary things, that I was eager to pacify him, and when he asked me to marry him, I had hard work to put him off. I am afraid I have prepared trouble for myself through vanity and weakness, and I have a strange feeling for Rex, which I cannot describe,—I cannot understand myself. It is attraction and repulsion combined. I rather despise myself, for I do not feel good when he is near me." She stopped and sat quite quiet for a minute, with such a troubled look in her face that I longed to comfort her in some way, but I felt half afraid to speak lest I should seem making too free. At last I ventured to say,—

"Why do you trouble yourself, Miss Constance? Just listen to Mr. Vivian and make up your mind to marry him, then you will feel settled. I am sure he is dotingly fond of you, and that's the chief thing. He is an elegant gentleman, and you'll have no more trouble, but plenty of everything and——"

"No more trouble!" she interrupted. "I am not so sure of that. I dread the idea of being absolutely *married* to Mr. Vivian! Ah! there is no use in talking or thinking about it all, only I promised to see him to-morrow, and I would give

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the world to escape it ; but I must not be a coward. How Alan despised moral cowardice ! I must face this—this danger, and nothing shall induce me to give a positive promise to Rex. Now I will go to bed, and oh, may I sleep !” She rose, and I followed her upstairs. She did not speak again till I was going to say good-night. Then she laid her hand on my shoulder and said, so kind and soft, “And you, Barbara ? Are you happy ? Do you often hear from Macpherson ? Is he nice and loving and true ?”

“Oh, yes, miss ! I am sure he is an honest, respectable fellow. He has not written so very often of late ; but you know it is a busy time, and the new under-gardener gives him a deal of trouble.”

“I trust he will make you as happy as you deserve to be. Ah, Barbara ! I wish I had your sound common sense. It is that that makes me trust you so much. Good-night. Sleep well.”

I must say I slept but badly. The fact is that Macpherson had grown anything but a good correspondent. When he did write, his letters were short and full of excuses. Indeed, I felt there was a great change in him, though maybe no one else but me would have noticed it. I intended to leave his last letter unanswered till he wrote to ask the reason why. I was always conscious that I was plain and insignificant, and it made me miserable to think of all the fine, handsome girls about Glengarvon and in Rockborough. It is so natural for men, ay, and women, too, to love beauty. What was it that drew me to my dear young lady but her grace and her lovely eyes, yes, and the thought of all I could do for her, with well-made, well-chosen clothes, and of how much she

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would owe to *me*. Then when I came to know her tender, kind heart, her generous, high spirit, her very quickness of temper sometimes, and a sort of haughtiness that made her so sore at being poor and dependent, I grew to love her with a real down-right love. She was so alone in the world, too, and her fancy for young Musgrave was such a misfortune, yet so natural. In short, I saw nothing for her but to marry Mr. Vivian, who was a match for any lady in the land. And as I thought of all these things I did say my prayers fervent, that both of us might be guided into the ways of peace.

Next forenoon my surprise may be imagined when nurse came to me and said there was a gentleman from Glengarvon downstairs who wanted to see me. My heart was in my mouth as the thought came to me that it might be James Macpherson come to see why I had not written. I asked no questions, for though I believed this for a minute, something told me (though I would not listen to it) that it could not be, so I asked no questions, fearing my little bit of blue sky should be clouded out of sight the minute it showed.

I went downstairs slowly, trying to keep my bit of blue in sight till I reached a small back parlour, like a tank, where people who came about business used to be put, and there I found Mr. Morris, the lawyer, browner and snuffier than ever. I could have cried, though I cannot say I really believed I should find James Macpherson.

"Well, Miss Barbara!" cried the little man. "I am right glad to see you, though you look more like London than the moors; a shade pale and heavy-eyed!"

I thanked him, and asked how he was.

"Ay!" he said, "I'm nigh weary of the world; it's a

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low, deceitful place ! The bad succeed, the worthy go to the wall. How is your young lady ? Better than your old lady, I hope ?”

“ Miss Morton is as well as she can be, sir.”

“ That’s all right ! I’m rather unlucky to hit on the very time when her ladyship takes a snooze. Not that I have anything very particular to say, but being in town I thought she might like to see me. Now I must wait to know her pleasure till she wakes, so I ventured to send for you, my lass.” And the old man looked at me in a wistful sort of way. Somehow it seemed suddenly revealed to me that, though one side of him was a hard, crafty, scheming lawyer, the other was a lonely old man, with the end coming near to him,—a lonely man who felt his loneliness. This made me feel sorry for him, and I said, “ Wouldn’t you like a cup of tea, sir ? I can get you one in a minute or two.”

“ Ay, that I would, my lass. It’s just the time I do have my tea at home. Cups o’ tea have been my dram-drinking all my life, and a good pull that has given me over my neighbours in the north, I can tell you.”

“ I don’t doubt it, Mr. Morris,” I said, and went away to get him the tea.

When I came back he was looking out of the window, without his spectacles.

“ Oh, there you are ! Thank you, my dear. So this is the fashionable part o’ Lunnon ? Well, it seems a dead and alive place. There’s no more than a couple of carriages and a dog-cart gone past all this time.”

“ These small West-end streets are very quiet ; that’s why her ladyship was brought here.”

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"Ay! ay! I suppose so." He sat down and began to drink his tea and eat the thin bread and butter I had cut for him with great zest. Presently he began again, "And how are things going on? Is the wedding fixed yet?"

"What wedding, sir?"

"Why, your young lady's with that Vivian."

"It isn't fixed at all. They are not even engaged." But as I said it I wondered what the upshot of the afternoon's interview might be.

"Ay! ay! but if my lady wills it and my gentleman wills it, the poor young lassie hasn't much chance."

"Chance of what?"

"Escape!" said he, grimly.

"Why should Miss Morton wish to escape Mr. Vivian? He is a fit sort of husband for her,—rich and grand and good-looking, and that fond of her."

"God help you, child!" says he, with his mouth full of bread and butter. "Don't you know that sugar makes vinegar? Ay, sour—sour vinegar." Then he stopped a bit and finished his tea in silence.

Brushing the crumbs from his waistcoat, he began again, "When did you hear from Glengarvon, my dear?"

"A week or two ago."

"Ah! Any news? No? Nothing about a wedding?"

"No! Who is going to be married?"

"A friend of yours, my lass. Now, Barbara West, I am going to give you a blow; maybe a cruel one; but you must be a brave woman and stand up against it. Madge Filmer, the green-grocer's daughter, is to be married next month to Macpherson, the gardener, at Glengarvon. I know it, for *her*

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father has been with me about settlements, for she'll have a good bit of money."

"Madge Filmer!" I cried, too stunned to feel hurt *yet*.
"Why, she is hump-backed!"

"If she has a hump on her back, she has a lump (of gold) in her pocket," said Morris.

"I can't believe it!" I cried, feeling as if the world had come to an end.

"Well, you may. And now, my dear lass, don't you grieve; that fellow is a money-grubbing bla'guard. He'd sell his soul for lucre, if he had one. What I tell you is true. The girl has been away for nigh two years with an aunt by the sea-side, for she is a poor, sickly creature. Anyhow, you write to Macpherson and tell him what you have heard. Ay, you may give him your authority, too. I don't want any screening. And have done with him. Bide a wee, and you'll yet see Macpherson tearing his hair and cursing the day he was false to you! Mark my words!"

"I don't want him to do one or the other," I said as quiet as I could, though I felt like choking or screaming. "I still cannot quite believe he is so—so false. If the other girl was a beauty, which I know I am not, I would be more inclined to forgive him; but if he throws away conscience and good faith for a mess of pottage, I am well rid of him!"

"Right you are, my lass. Stick to that! It's cruel hard on you; but, thank God, you found him out afore instead of after marriage. If you have any letters of his, I'd like to look at them, for you might screw heavy damages."

He looked keenly at me as he spoke, but I cried out, "Damages! No, Mr. Morris. I am a poor girl, but I'd want

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for bread before I'd show my heart and its weakness in a law court. If James Macpherson is all you say he is, and I begin to fear he is, let him go ! I'll not try to hold him !"

"There's a brave woman ! No, I only mentioned damages experimentally. You are right. You'll have a fine revenge by and by."

"Revenge I don't want. It's low and it's foolish. But, Mr. Morris, I'll go and see if my lady is awake, and—and I'll say good-bye. I thank you for your kind feeling for me, but I want to be awhile by myself."

It was a bitter blow. All my pleasant dreams of a nice, cosy home, a steady friend and companion in a husband, of thrift and perseverance to help him build up a tidy little fortune,—all gone, myself adrift and lonely, and made a fool of and a laughing-stock into the bargain.

Oh, I cannot write any more ! I hated myself and all the world.

CHAPTER XVII.

"BARBARA CONTINUES."

THOUGH I cannot write about myself, I may as well tell what I know of my dear young lady's story, for she was very uneasy and troubled just then. She liked Mr. Vivian and she didn't.

While he was with her he exercised a curious power over her. As soon as she was out of his sight—or, rather, he out of hers—she doubted and feared him. At first I used to wonder why she did not make up her mind to marry him.

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It would have been a splendid settlement for her, and it seemed to me he could make any one love him. Yet by degrees I came to share her distrust, simply because she distrusted him. It was strange for her to think evil of any one ; and just because it was unaccountable and unreasonable, it made a sort of impression on me.

I knew that the interview Mr. Vivian asked for that night when Miss Morton was so agitated had been interrupted ; for they had hardly got into their talk when my lady sent for me. I was ready to drop with mortification and misery, but I pulled myself together and went.

"Go, Barbara, and send Mr. Vivian to me. I want to speak to him before I see Morris." Of course, I was obliged to obey. Mr. Vivian was standing by the mantle-shelf and Miss Constance was at the writing-table, writing some notes. If ever eyes shot curses at an innocent body Mr. Vivian's did at me when I spoke.

"Couldn't you have had to look for me a while?" he said, smoothing himself down in the extraordinary alarming way he had. "What does she want?"

"I can't say, sir. Only Mr. Morris is here, and she wants to speak to you, sir, before she sees him."

"What brings that snuffy old limb of the law here?" he says, with a frown. "I had better get it over. I shall find you here, shall I not, Constance?"

"Yes ; I am not going out."

"I shall not be long, then," he added, and went off out of the room.

Miss Constance stood up, came across to where I stood, and, laying her hand on my shoulder, said,—

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"What is the matter, Barbara? You look strangely ill and miserable! Tell me what has happened? I will help you, if I can."

I could not answer. The mortification was still strong upon me, and I knew I should break down and cry my eyes out if I began.

"Will you not tell me, Barbara?" she went on in her soft, tender way. "Is anything wrong with Macpherson? Is he ill?"

With that a bitter sort of funniness came over me, and I felt strong in a minute.

"Yes, Miss Constance, he is taken very bad indeed!"

"He seems a strong, healthy man. What is the matter with him?"

"A very bad fit of unfaithfulness, miss."

"How is that? Is it a true report or only ill nature? Do not be too ready to believe evil."

"I am afraid it is too true," said I, feeling more myself. "But I will write straight to him and repeat what I have been told."

"Do so, Barbara. Do it at once. Then go and see your mother. I fancy that in all troubles the clasp of a mother's arms must comfort and strengthen. I shall not want you any more to-day."

"Thank you, dear Miss Constance. But I do not want to see my mother; not just yet. I will go and write to James, and see what he can say for himself. I have no hope that he can explain matters. I must just try not to make a fool of myself."

"That you will never do, Barbara. You have too much sense and self-respect."

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As she spoke the door was opened by the man of the house who acted as butler and announced "Mrs. Quentin." So I slipped away, and how the day ended I don't know. All I felt was heart- and headache both. But I am quite sure Mr. Vivian lost his chance of persuading Miss Morton to engage herself to him, for things were rather upset for some time after that.

In due time I got my answer from Mr. Macpherson, which was about as lying a composition as ever man wrote down and set his name to. He had noticed a great change, indeed, in me, that I had grown cold and indifferent, and, forsooth, our opinions were strongly opposed on many important points; that he did not know how I spent my time during my absence in London, but I never visited his friends whose addresses he had given me (as if I were going to call first!), and all to that. It filled me with a sort of scorn that helped me greatly to keep up my spirits and look every one straight in the face. Not but that my heart was sore, as if some deadly gangrene was eating it away. Anyhow, I wrote very short in return. I quite agreed with him that as we knew each other better I could perceive there was a great gulf fixed between us, and for my part I wasn't going to risk my life jumping over it. Then I put up his presents, a brooch and pair of earrings of Scotch pebbles, a prayer-book, and a Shetland shawl. Didn't I thank my stars I had had the sense not to be photographed for him! He and his rich young lady couldn't make a mock of my plain face. So that was all over, and never can I forget my dear Miss Morton's sympathy and good counsel. Without opening her lips upon the subject, she let me know how much she felt with me and for me. But for all that I did

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dread going back and meeting that poor creature face to face. I little thought then how matters would end.

Whether it was seeing Mr. Morris (he came two or three times) and the familiar talk about all the goings on at Glengarvon, I can't tell, but from that day her ladyship set her mind on going home. She wouldn't hear of going to Torquay. She stopped all negotiation about a house. She gave notice herself to Mrs. Chadwick, the landlady, and I shall never forget her and the doctor, as I happened to be waiting on her when he called a few days after my poor bit of a story was finished.

Nurse went to see a little boy of hers at school, hearing he was out of sorts. So I was left to attend my lady, who had grown to like me and my ways. Indeed, she was stronger, and tried to do as much as she could and more for herself.

The doctor who came to see her ladyship once a week was a very big man, indeed, and accustomed to give the law on every point.

"Don't tell him I have had my man of business with me this morning," said my lady, quick and sharp, when he was announced. I had no time to answer before he was in the room. He was tall and stout, with thick grizzled eyebrows and bushy whiskers, and a "big bow-wow" voice.

"Well, Lady Glengarvon, I hope you have a good account to give of yourself to-day. You are looking slightly flushed. Allow me," taking her wrist. "Hum! You've been exciting yourself, eh? Who has her ladyship had to see her?" this to me.

"No one in particular, sir."

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"Ah! Who is this young woman? Have you dismissed Nurse Roper?"

"No. Nurse has gone to see her boy, who is not well. So my niece Miss Morton's maid is attending to me."

"Hum! Nurses ought not to have boys! Great mistake! The sooner you are away from this, Lady Glengarvon, the better."

"I quite agree with you, doctor." Then he went on to cross-examine her about her symptoms, and asked a lot of awful questions as if there was no one there but himself and his patient. I kept to my knitting in the window. The doctor didn't seem too pleased and a little puzzled.

"Well," he said at last, "have you found suitable quarters at Torquay?"

"No. I don't intend to go there. I shall return to Glengarvon."

"What! to that bleak northeasterly place! I could not hear of such insanity."

"Well, you must, my dear doctor; for I shall go nowhere else. This horrid town will be the death of me, and I'm not a state prisoner; I'm not a lunatic. I am almost myself again (thanks to your skill), and it's time I were back in my own territory to save things from going to rack and ruin."

"Better they did than for you to shorten your life."

"I don't agree with you. I've spent my life trying to save Glengarvon from rack and ruin, and I'd gladly give up a good many years to keep it in order."

"Then try to live for it. How do you know if its next possessor will manage it prudently?"

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"Not a bad hit, doctor. I hope and think he will, but I am not going to make room for him just yet."

"I can but assure your ladyship," said the doctor, solemnly, "that if you persist in acting in opposition to my advice, I cannot answer for the consequences."

"Then I shall, doctor," said my lady, quite cheerfully, as if she enjoyed the battle; "and I hope, if you can take a holiday this year, you'll come down to Glengarvon and kill as many grouse as you've saved human beings."

I am sure I could hardly believe my ears when I heard her give this invitation. She never seemed to think it possible to invite any one. Even Mr. Vivian came when he chose, not for my lady's asking.

But the doctor could stand no more. He rose up in wrath and bid her ladyship good-morning very stiffly; but he did not disdain to take his fee, which she handed him in bare golden sovereigns. She used to say she could not see the good of wrapping up in paper what was pleasant to every eye.

So soon as the great man was gone she said, "Can you write?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

"Well, get pen and paper. I am lazy and you shall do secretary. Miss Morton is out, eh?"

"Yes, my lady; she is gone to walk with Mrs. Quentin's children."

"Well, have you the writing materials? Then begin. 'Dear Rex, I want to see you to-day or to morrow. Yours truly.' Here, give me the pen and paper; I'll sign my name."

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She did so, strong and large. I'd swear to her E. Glengarvon anywhere.

"Now, Barbara," she said, "send that at once to Mr. Vivian. No answer. Who will take it?"

"There's a messenger lad below who runs all the errands."

"And charges for them. No, you are doing nothing, and a run will do you good. Go! put on your bonnet."

"But, my lady, I was to stay with you till nurse came back. Miss Constance will be very displeased if I leave you."

"Pooh! Nonsense, rubbish! Your duty is to obey *me*! Who pays and feeds you? Go, this moment!"

No one at Glengarvon ever thought of saying "no" to the baroness, and I dared not oppose her, still I hesitated.

"Am I a helpless cripple or a mischievous idiot?" she asked, angrily. "Do as I bid you!" So I went.

You may be sure I did not linger on the road, and our landlord looked quite surprised when he opened the door to me on my return.

"Well, Miss West, you have been quick," he said.

"Yes, I made haste;" but I didn't think it necessary to tell him I took a 'bus in Piccadilly, nor my lady either. She would never have given me the fourpence.

I slipped off my bonnet and cloak and went into Lady Glengarvon's room. She was dozing in her chair, and the newspaper in her hand, a thing I never knew her to do at home.

"Oh, you are there, Barbara. Well, was Mr. Vivian at home?"

"No, my lady; so I just left the note."

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"Right. Now read this passage to me—there, left side, top—about some new manure they have invented in Germany."

After I had read for some time nurse came back, and I left her with my lady.

It was rather disturbing to hear we were to go back to Glengarvon ; for of course I thought Miss Constance and myself must go, too, and I did dread the thought of meeting Macpherson. If he had been carried away by a sudden fancy for a sweet, pretty girl, I could have forgiven him. I was no beauty, and I can imagine what an attraction beauty must be to men, when I, a woman, love even to make the clothes of a pretty girl ; but with him it was just filthy lucre from beginning to end.

Miss Constance came up to dress early that evening, and I told her how her aunt had sent off the doctor and was going home. My young lady was a good deal concerned.

"I am sure Aunt Elizabeth ought to go to some south coast place," she said ; "it is so cold and bleak at Glengarvon. She is by no means so well as she fancies she is. I am sure Rex will advise her to try Torquay. I don't care to go back to Glengarvon myself ; but that is no matter, and I feel it is ungrateful of me to be so faithless to the only home I ever knew. But I always feel brighter in London. Is it not strange that Mr. Vivian has not been here for two days ? I never knew him stay away so long."

"He may be busy, Miss Constance. I saw in the paper this morning that he had made a speech in the House last night."

"Yes ; a good speech, too, so far as words went. I am

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not sure I understand it enough to judge fairly. It was something about Russia and Turkey. I think, Barbara, he is very much offended with me. I was so thankful that our interview was interrupted, that he perceived it, and said he would not trespass on me again till I asked him, and since I have never seen him alone. I do not want to quarrel with him, but oh ! I do not want to marry him. I do not know what I want. Last night, when I was at the theatre with Mrs. Quentin, Mr. Vivian was in a box opposite with two very distinguished-looking women, one of them very handsome. He bowed and kissed his hand, but never came to speak to us. Mrs. Quentin seemed quite surprised, and so was Colonel Bingham, who was our escort. I must say I rather missed him, one gets so used to people, but I felt more at rest and able to enjoy things. Yet I fear I am ungrateful to him too."

"Oh, Mr. Vivian is just vexed a bit, miss. He'll not stay away long."

"I do not deserve that he should have much patience."

Then my dear young lady began to talk to me of my own troubles ; but I am not going to write a word more about them.

Mr. Vivian came fast enough at my lady's call, and they had a long talk that very evening. Miss Morton had been reading to her aunt, who sent her away as soon as he appeared.

"He spoke to me with well-bred indifference," she said to me when she came up to her room, where I sat sewing. "But I rather like the change. I feel as if a window had been opened in an overheated room and cool, fresh air let in. I

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suppose Aunt Elizabeth wants to arrange about going home. I think Rex is the only creature on whom she depends in any way."

Sure enough, we heard next day that everything was settled. Her ladyship was to travel home next Saturday. Nurse was to go with her and stay a few days, and Mr. Vivian himself would escort her safely to her own abode.

She would not hear, however, of Miss Morton or myself leaving town, and grew quite cross when my young lady tried to persuade her to let us come, too. She said obedience was a better proof of true regard than asserting one's own will under the mask of affection and attention. "She can say very unkind things sometimes, Barbara," Miss Constance added, with a sigh; "but I am glad to stay awhile with Mrs. Quentin. With her, too, one sees all the papers and hears the newest news."

From that time we were very busy getting everything ready for Lady Glengarvon's departure. It was wonderful to see how she brightened up and seemed a new woman at the idea of going to her own place. I'm sure the name of Glengarvon was written on her heart, as poor papist Queen Mary said Calais was written on hers.

Anyway, I was delighted to escape returning to Glengarvon for awhile, and so I think was Miss Morton.

It was quite delightful to be at Mrs. Quentin's. Things were not very grand or fine in her house, but orderly and comfortable; and oh! so different from the disorderly skimpiness of lodgings, where the poor souls were obliged to make their bit of profit on everything or they couldn't keep a roof over their heads.

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The children were such dear creatures, and, naughty or good, kept one alive and interested.

I am sure my dear young lady was of my way of thinking ; anyway, we both settled down very contentedly, and as the news from Glengarvon was fairly good, there was nothing to disturb *her* at any rate. The weather was growing fine and bright. Miss Morton often came out shopping and looking at pictures with me, for Mrs. Quentin left her quite free.

For awhile Mr. Vivian did not come much to the house. There was a lot of fighting going on in Parliament, and he always seemed in the thick of it ; but after a while he came gradually back in the old way, and appeared better friends with my young lady than even he used to be.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MORE than a month was gone since Lady Glengarvon had taken the law into her own hands and retreated to her northern home. The time had passed swiftly and pleasantly. Constance was somewhat surprised that she did not feel Vivian's avoidance of her more, considering how strong an influence he exercised over her when he was present, and he was still more surprised at the small effect his absence produced.

Naturally, the one who cared least proved the strongest, and after a few weeks Vivian returned to his old habit of haunting his sister's house, his old way of watching and teasing Constance. Only he never alluded to Alan Musgrave since that audacious parvenue had distinguished himself.

"What exquisite flowers you have, and in such profusion !"

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exclaimed Vivian one afternoon, when he came in to his sister's drawing-room on his way to the House, as he often did.

"Yes. Are they not lovely? They are young Dyke's tribute to Constance."

"Oh, rather thrown away, I imagine."

"No. Both Constance and I enjoy them very much."

"I don't think she would look at the young beggar."

Silence. "You don't think she would?" interrogatively.

"It is impossible to say. He is not a bad sort of boy and a very good match."

"I am a considerably better one, from every point of view, and I do not intend Constance to marry any one but myself."

"That depends on what *she* intends. Constance has a will of her own, and what is worse, for herself at least, she has a heart; which, if you *do* marry her, I hope you will not break."

"My dear sister, I did not know you had so flattering an opinion of me."

"You are a curious, unscrupulous creature, Rex, and I fancy better in every other relation of life than as a lover or a husband. Yet I can't help being fond of you."

Vivian laughed and settled himself in a comfortable arm-chair. "Where is my lady,—my bride-elect?"

"I don't know. She has been arranging all these flowers, and went away with the *débris*. She will be here directly." And as she spoke the door opened to admit Constance. Vivian sprang up to greet her.

"Have you heard from Glengarvon?" were his first words.

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"No; I had my letter the beginning of the week. Aunt Elizabeth never writes twice in seven or eight days. And this time Wylie wrote for her."

"I had a brief epistle yesterday. The baroness wants to see me on particular business, so I have promised to run down to-morrow night and give her Saturday and Sunday. She has taken to consulting me a good deal lately, though she is an infinitely better man of business than I am."

"I rather think that as the future Lord Glengarvon she believes you must be divinely inspired for the right management of the property," said Mrs. Quentin, laughing.

"The last possessor certainly was not inspired," observed Vivian.

"No; he was rather feckless."

"Do try and find out if my aunt would care to have me with her, Rex."

"I don't think that needs much finding out, my dear Constance. Our benighted relative prefers the company of snuffy old Morris and the thrifty Mrs. Wylie to the charm of yours."

"Well, Rex, though she does not show it much, I do think she *is* a little fond of me."

"A little! My God! fancy being a *little* fond of you."

"The carriage is at the door, 'm," answered the butler.

"What a nuisance!" said Vivian.

"Oh, Constance is not coming," remarked Mrs. Quentin, with a smile. "She must wait for an important personage, the dressmaker, who is to try on her dress for to-morrow's ball."

"To be sure! It is infernally annoying that I shall be

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spinning along in the train while you are lavishing your smiles on young Dyke at her Grace's grand ball."

"Yes, I am sorry you cannot be there. You are an excellent partner, Rex."

"Thank you. What are you going to wear? You have developed a wonderful taste in dress since your brown holland frock days. Eh, Constance?"

She smiled absently.

"I assure you she has a charming gown," said Mrs. Quentin: "ripe corn-coloured crape and satin, with her white Brussels lace, bouquets of violets, and long trails of foliage sparkling with dew."

"Heavens!" cried Vivian, closing his eyes. "I see the beauteous vision."

"Well, good-bye for the present," said Mrs. Quentin, leaving the room.

A pause ensued.

"What message shall I take to your aunt for you?" asked Vivian.

"I think it mere waste to send any. Aunt Elizabeth would not thank me for my love," said Constance, smiling.

"Give it to me and I will keep it for myself, Constance! How badly you have been treating me! Believe me, it is unwise to play fast and loose with a man of my nature. I am apt to demand payment in full of what I think is my due."

"You are not as black as you paint yourself, Rex. I do not think you would do me any harm."

Vivian laughed rather a mocking laugh. "You don't know me, my sweet! Why, it is an age since I dared,—no, not dared, cared to apply a term of endearment to you. I have

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been furious with you. You slipped through my fingers in a dastardly fashion. Will you make it up now? Let your message to your aunt be this: 'I will marry Rex Vivian about the beginning of June.' Eh? That will leave enough time for all preparations."

"Why, Rex! considering that we have scarcely spoken to each other for some time till the last fortnight, this is rather abrupt."

"Don't trifle, Constance; I am desperately serious; and don't be uncandid, for you *have* a little leaning towards me. Listen! I can't put you out of my head, my heart, my imagination. Had we not been interrupted that day, when you consented to hear me, we should have been now engaged, probably on the eve of marriage."

"I do not think so, Rex," she interrupted, with the composure which came of having discussed the same subject before.

"Let me speak to you frankly. I have a curious dread of being absolutely married to you. I cannot account for it. You are very nice. I like you."

"But the memory of young Musgrave comes between us?"

"No," very slowly. "I do not really think it does. You have so convinced me that it is all hopeless folly to let him dwell in my mind, that I begin to forget."

"Let me help you. That boy never loved you as I do. He was not willing to risk body and soul for you as I am. Come, Constance, you have not a single reasonable reason to urge against me."

"But 'the heart has reasons reason does not know,'" quoted Constance, while as she said it the vision of her own loneliness rose before her, and the thought, "Am I wise to reject

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this man's love,—the rest, the protection, he can give me,—when I have nothing to fall back upon? I am untutored,—untrained. How could I maintain myself if my aunt cast me off? I could make Rex happy, and I might grow to love him very much.”

These thoughts absorbed her. Vivian continued to speak, but the sense of his words escaped her. “If you persist in disappointing your aunt she may turn against you,” he was saying when she listened again.

“And would *you* never change, Rex?”

There was an infinitesimal hesitation smaller than any existing measure of time. Constance felt rather than perceived it. Then Rex exclaimed, emphatically,—

“Never! You are not the sort of woman to tire of, Constance. You have *esprit* and infinite variety. Even your goodness is not insipid, for you *are* good. And if you were not, if you were the devil's daughter and moulded in the mental form of your infernal sire, I should love you passionately, as I do.”

Constance laughed. Yet a shiver ran through her.

“Not a very high class of love, Rex,” she said. “Give me time to think.”

“You have had lots of time, Constance. However, I will not ask you for a final answer till next week, when I return from Glengarvon. Will you make up your mind then?”

“I will, Rex. It is not right to keep you in uncertainty. How is it that you care for me so much?”

“Ah! that's a question none answer. There are more beautiful women than you, Constance, but not for me. And

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what the charm is which fascinates me I can only feel, I cannot explain."

"It is all very wonderful," said Constance, in a low voice and looking at him with grave composure.

"And you are a wonderful creature. But my best thanks for your promised decision. It cannot, shall not, must not be 'no!'"

"Good-bye for the present," she returned, holding out her hand.

"Am I dismissed, Constance?" trying to draw her to him. "Give me one kiss as a token of good will. To think that in all these months I have talked to you of love and have never dared to take a kiss, though how desperately my lips have thirsted for yours, you cannot know; at least not now!"

"Do not think of it, Rex. No, I dare not kiss you *yet*. Not—not till the wish to do so comes. Let me go, Rex. You will offend me bitterly if you do not."

"And *I* dare not risk *that*." He pressed his lips to her hand and left her hastily, as if he would not trust himself to stay.

Constance was very thoughtful and silent for the rest of the afternoon. And Vivian would have been hopeful and exultant had he known how large a share he occupied in her meditations.

Mrs. Quentin had a few guests at dinner, and, though she looked pale and tired, Constance took her share, well and brightly, in the general conversation.

"I met the Everards last night at Lady Belmore's," said an elderly club gossip, who was rather a favourite of Mrs. Quentin's, because he brought her the newest news and made

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her laugh. "They were the guests of the evening and greatly *fêted*."

"What!" said another of the party, "Bob Everard, who was shut up in that unpronounceable place and besieged by the Pandies?"

"The same. Of course we talked nothing but mutiny. Gad! they had a narrow escape. Mrs. Everard is only beginning to recover her nerves, and Everard is as yellow as a guinea,—a regular scarecrow."

"Now they have Delhi and that poor old pantaloon of a king, the whole thing will collapse." And the talk drifted to the impending changes in our great Indian empire.

But Constance did not hear it. She listened eagerly for the mention of Musgrave's name, but in vain. Yet she knew that but for him these *fêted* guests would never have seen their native land again. And the vision of his young, resolute face, his fearless, honest eyes, came back to her and would not leave her sight. With what utter confidence would she have laid her hand in his and gone out with him into the maze of life! But she must not think of this; everything forbade the realisation of such a dream. He must not spoil the career which opened before him by any entanglement with a high-born pauper, and she—— Well, if Alan had set her free, how could she bind up the broken links, voluntarily broken by him? It was despicable weakness to look back, to think of what had been. Yet she dropped asleep thinking of the sweet old days, and dreamed she was sitting with Alan under the shelter of the cairn, while he was saying, "Only be happy and I can bear everything."

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Her Grace of G——'s entertainments were magnificent functions when they did take place. As a general rule, she was too great a lady to be flurried by fashion, and enjoyed the society of her intimates quietly. On the present occasion the reviving spirits of society, which had been for months depressed by the critical state of affairs in the East, helped to make the ball at G—— house unusually brilliant, as if the reaction from previous dulness sent the pendulum far in the opposite direction.

The dresses were fresh and the faces bright, while the display of jewels was finer than at the drawing-room of the week before ; and though Constance was now no novice in brilliant scenes, she was struck by, and interested in, the splendid interior of G—— house and the treasures of art with which it was decorated.

Of course, Mrs. Quentin met heaps of acquaintances, and partners soon offered for Constance.

The floor was perfect and the music excellent, but the crowd was too great to allow of much pleasure in dancing, as the rooms filled, and the cry was still "they come."

"It is really useless to try," said Constance to her partner, the young Dyke mentioned by Vivian, who had lately succeeded to a large fortune amassed by his father, an "eminent brewer." "When the people begin to refresh downstairs there will be a little more room."

"All right. And meantime let us sit in the conservatory. It is quite beautiful. Have you seen it?"

"Yes ; but it would be too long to stay away. I had better try to join Mrs. Quentin. She is sitting in the yellow draw-

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ing-room under that lovely Vandyke portrait of the Duchess of G—— in his time."

"We'll never get there now!" exclaimed the young man. "Some of the people will be going on to other dances presently. Every one is sure to come here first. I came rather early, and it was quite amusing to see heaps of celebrities pass in review. I thought I knew pretty nearly every one in town at any rate by sight, but Sir Francis Calthorpe, who came with me, pointed out a heap more. Among them some Indian people. They are beginning to come back now. By Jove! we'll have a supply calculated to last for a term of years."

"I wish you would point out some to me," said Constance, as they stood waiting for a chance to pass through the wide doors leading into the next saloon, which were far from wide enough for the throng pressing through them.

"I don't see any about," he returned, looking round. "I fancy Mr. and Mrs. Everard are the first instalment of the supply. They are certainly not much to look at, but she has a nice, thoughtful face. The duchess received them with great *empressement*. Come, Miss Morton, I see some people are filtering off; here to the left there's a passage through to the staircase. We'll have a look at it. It is deuced fine."

As they moved slowly in the direction indicated and succeeded clearing the crowd, Constance found herself noticing the back of a gentleman going in the same direction as herself. He was tall and, though broad-shouldered, slight in figure. There was something familiar in the setting on of his head, and his hair at the back was cropped exceedingly close. He

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carried himself in an upright military style, and Constance was amused at the sort of languid interest this not very remarkable figure excited in her mind.

A well-dressed lady leant on his arm, to whom he was speaking ; but the buzz of the talk prevented Constance from catching the sound of his voice.

As soon as they reached the comparative quiet of a gallery overlooking the hall, and on which all the reception-rooms opened, the pair halted, and the lady quickly appropriated a vacant seat. Her companion stood for an instant before her, as if finishing what he had to say, and then turned slowly round, thus coming face to face with Constance and her partner, who were waiting to pass.

For a second everything swam before her eyes, as she unconsciously clasped Dyke's arm tightly, and exclaimed, "Alan—Alan Musgrave!"

He, too, started. A sudden flash of joyous fire gleamed from his eyes, as if all the electric lights in the palace of his soul had shot forth their radiance at the touch of a divine delight. Then he half closed them, as if in a supreme effort at self-control, and, making a step forward, said, hesitating, "Constance—Miss Morton," taking the hand she held out.

"Oh, Alan, how glad I am to see you! How—how did you come here,—here in England?"

All this passed more swiftly than it can be told, and her hand was still tightly locked in his.

"I am invalided home on short leave, and——" He stopped, silenced by his profound admiration of the brilliant, distinguished lovely girl before him. Could this be his play-

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fellow, his child sweetheart, to whom his own sisters were superior in dress and adornments, and whose charm lay in her wild-flower-like grace, her tender, almost sad, thoughtfulness, this creature of rich colouring, her lips apart, her fair round throat quivering with the quick pulses beating in her bosom, her lustrous eyes soft with the love-light she made no attempt to conceal?

"Come," resumed Constance, careless of everything save her wish to speak with him, to hear every atom respecting him he had to tell, "I must introduce you to Mrs. Quentin. She will be so pleased." But Alan's hesitation recalled her to herself. "Pray excuse me," she went on, turning to Dyke; "Mr. Musgrave is an old acquaintance of mine, of ours. I did not know he was in England, and——"

"Oh, of course," in a dissatisfied tone. "But when we can dance, where shall I find you?"

"Don't mind me," said the lady whose escort Musgrave had been. "You know Sir Edward promised to meet me here. I am glad you found an acquaintance." And she smiled kindly on him.

Musgrave murmured something, and the next moment Constance felt her hand pressed to his side. But as they walked towards the head of the grand staircase a strange silence fell upon her. The delightful familiarity of the dear old days seemed to fade away, and instead a curious hesitation chilled her. Alan seemed older; his face was so stern and set; there was much firmness and dignity in his bearing; and, but for that one joyous flash from his eyes, he did not seem overpowered with delight at their meeting as *she* was. Yet how his heart beat against her hand!

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"I can hardly believe it," she said at length, looking up into his eyes.

"To meet me in such a house must be amazing," he returned, with a smile.

"No!" she returned, a look of pride coming to her speaking eyes. "No, Alan. Not now. I only knew you once. Now you are the fit guest for princes."

"Ah, do not speak such words to me, Constance! It is more than the strongest head could bear. Here is a quiet seat in this corner. They are dancing again. Stay with me for a few minutes. I will not detain you long."

"Oh, yes! let us stay here a little while. I want to hear so much, to ask so much."

"How changed you are!" began Musgrave, when they had seated themselves on a settee safely out of the way of passers-by. "You look a great lady. Only the eyes, the smile; they are the same."

"And how changed *you* are, Alan! You look so stern. I am half afraid to speak to you."

He laughed; there was a note of sadness in his laughter.

"That would be the most comic change of all. Well, I have gone through some strange scenes since we met. Now I must explain. I had been wounded rather badly more than six months ago; then I got about rather too soon. We had hard work in the corps (a regiment of irregular horse) to which I was attached, and the fever took hold of me. So the doctor sent me home for six months' leave. Some friends whom I made in India hearing this asked me to rest at their house in town before going north, and Mrs. Everard proposed I should accompany her and her husband to see this grand affair. They

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got me a card, and here I am. I confess I had a strong belief I should meet you, for I presume you are to be met in most of the gay and glittering scenes of this great town."

"Then you have not yet seen your mother? How overjoyed they will be to welcome you! and your father! You will be glad to see the old place, Alan."

"Both glad and sad. No place will ever be to me what Glengarvon is, and I want to steep my mind and saturate my memory with its beauties,—ay, and its grimness; for I expect I shall be an old man before I see it again. India must be my home for the future, if a soldier can be said to have a home." While he spoke the rich colouring faded from his companion's cheek. She understood that he had renounced all hope of herself, yet this roused no sense of pique or resentment. She knew Alan loved her well, but also she knew that he would not weaken himself by playing with what he must give up. Yet her heart ached to cry to him, "Wait! Hope!" But it was not for her to do this, and she respected him because he was man enough to relinquish utterly what he dared not try to hold.

"And who are you staying with, Alan?" she asked, in an altered voice, bending her eyes on the carpet.

"Mr.—that is, Sir Edward Everard and his wife. They are very kind friends of mine."

"They well may be," cried Constance, the colour coming back to her cheek, "considering what you saved them from."

"Have you heard that old story?" he asked, with a smile.

"Old! It is quite fresh. I read it not six weeks ago in the *Times*."

"Ah! there's many and many a story to beat that, when the

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endless tale of the Mutiny comes to be written. Strong necessity brings out qualities that have lain dormant all a fellow's life before, or creates them."

"Perhaps so; but you will find yourself a popular hero when you reach Glengarvon." Musgrave smiled and shook his head, and there was a short pause. Then, with a slightly embarrassed air, Musgrave began: "I am going to make a rather audacious request; but I have a sufficient motive for making it, as you would, I think, admit, if I can ever explain it."

"I am quite satisfied about your motives, even if you never explain them, Alan."

"May I come to see you, then, *once?* and may I see you alone?"

"Yes, certainly; come to-morrow. Mrs. Quentin is going out of town till Monday. You must know her. She is Rex Vivian's sister, but she is not a bit like him."

"I remember seeing her long ago."

"Come, let us look for her. I hope she is still in the large drawing-room, for if I lose her——"

Constance did not finish her sentence, but rose as she spoke, and Musgrave followed her example.

"Then once more I may have a real long, uninterrupted talk with you," he said, his eyes lingering on hers; and after, "What matter to me?"

"No, Alan; everything matters, for you are at the beginning of a fine career, and when you are commander-in-chief may I be there to see. Come, we must look for my kind chaperon." She took his arm, and they went in search of Mrs. Quentin.

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That lady had just risen to look for her young charge in the ball-room when Constance was so fortunate as to catch her eye.

"Mrs. Quentin, let me introduce our Glengarvon hero to you. Alan Musgrave, Mrs. Quentin," said Constance, the quick colour mounting to her brow and then fading away.

"Very pleased, indeed, to meet you, Mr. Musgrave," in a most gracious tone, and smiling upon him. "I have just been speaking to Lady Everard, who told me you had come with her. I hope you are feeling stronger and better?"

While Alan replied, Constance remarked and admired his quiet self-possession, which at the same time was absolutely free from the slightest tinge of self-assertion.

"You must come and see us, Mr. Musgrave. Mr. Quentin will be very glad to make your acquaintance." Musgrave bowed. "Do you make any stay in town?"

"Only a very few days."

"Then you must give us one of them. Ah! here is Lady Everard."

"Yes," said that lady, joining them. "I have come to carry off my invalid." After a few more words, she took Musgrave's arm and they left the ball.

"How hot and crowded it is!" said Mrs. Quentin, fanning herself.

"Yes, I am quite tired already. Shall we go?"

"But, Constance, would you not like a little more dancing?"

"No, thanks; I have a headache and I have seen everything."

"Sensible girl. Let us be off, then. I am so glad they have made that nice little man Everard a K.C.B. I am sure he deserved it."

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CHAPTER XIX.

BARBARA was surprised at her young lady's early return from the great ball. She looked white and tired, and was unusually silent, until she reached the stage of undressing, when, wrapped in her *peignoir*, she sat down to have her hair brushed.

Barbara, who always followed her lady's lead, refrained from speech, though she looked forward with interest to any details Constance chose to give of the various parties at which she appeared.

"Well, Barbara," she said at last, "it was the grandest ball I ever saw. At any rate, I shall never forget it. Who do you think I have been talking to?"

"Oh, how can I tell, miss? Most likely Mr. Vivian, after all?"

"No, Barbara; to a better man. To Alan Musgrave. There in the midst of nobles and grandees of all kinds, and one of the honoured guests, there he was, 'simple, erect, severe.' So far, Byron's description of the Pantheon describes *him*. I do not know how I kept myself from falling on his neck and weeping tears of joy. It was *his* self-control that saved me. He is changed, Barbara; but I would not have him different. Oh, how sweet it is to hear his voice again, to look into his eyes, to feel the clasp of his hand, and to know that my instinct—the instinct that drew my love and trust to him—was true! But that must be all put away now, Barbara. I can see that. He has accepted our destiny; our lives must be apart, and he will be strong and

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brave about it. So must I. I will show him I can be as brave as himself. Oh, Barbara, Barbara! shall I ever live long enough into the dark misty future to look back with half-contemptuous indulgence on this love which wrings my heart as a bit of girlish weakness and folly! And he loves me! Oh, yes, he loves me still! I can never forget how for a second the joy of his soul, at seeing me blazed out in his eyes,—his beautiful, thoughtful blue eyes, that I shall never see more than once or twice again." She bowed her head and covered her face with her hands.

Barbara felt quite dismayed. What an unlucky *rencontre*! What on earth brought that tiresome young Musgrave back to spoil sport and torment her dear Miss Constance! What bunglers those Indians must be to shoot such a lot of people and miss him!

"Well, miss, you must have been startled," she said, recommencing operations on her lady's long, abundant hair. "At any rate, Mr. Musgrave seems a very sensible young man, and though I dare say you think now you'll never change, the time *will* come when you'll look back with a sort of pity and wonder at this—this state of mind—" She stopped, fearing the indiscretion of her own tongue, and Constance exclaimed,—

"Pity, no! Wonder! Ah! probably. Wonder that so fine a fellow as Alan should care for a weak, worldly, vacillating creature such as I am!"

"Dear Miss Constance, all these fancies will pass away before you are six months married to Mr. Vivian."

"Barbara! I do not feel like marrying any one! At this moment it would be utter desecration, above all, to marry

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Rex Vivian. The sight of Alan has extinguished him. Go, Barbara, go to bed ; it is late ; and I want to sleep, oh, so much ! To sleep and forget everything. Good-night ! We are both forlorn damsels, Barbara, rejected by our lovers." And she laughed a sad little laugh.

"At least, Miss Constance, yours has earned a right to your respect ; which is more than I can say of mine," returned Barbara, as she left the room.

* * * * *

"Why, Constance," cried Mrs. Quentin, when that young lady entered the dining-room next morning, "you could not look worse if you had danced till dawn last night !"

"Dreams and an uneasy conscience," returned Constance, smiling. "My tea will put me quite right."

"I have been just telling Mr. Quentin," continued the hostess, passing the teacup, "about our meeting with young Musgrave last night. He is exceedingly good-looking,—even distinguished-looking,—very soldierly, and quite well bred. It is wonderful what drill and discipline can do. I suppose he was a rough country lout when he enlisted."

"No," said Constance, stirring her tea. "The Musgraves come of an old border race ; are better born, I fancy, than—Mr. Dyke, for instance. Old Mr. Musgrave gave Alan a good education, for he wished him to be a lawyer. They were much better off some ten years ago, but every one seems to have lost their money in the country. I used to play with the Musgrave girls ; they were very nice and well brought up,—better indeed than I was,—and much better dressed."

"It is perfectly infamous the way in which you were neg-

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lected !” cried Mrs. Quentin with unusual vehemence, while she shot a searching glance at Constance.

“ You have repaid me for that, dear Mrs. Quentin.”

“ With his reputation and the good looks you describe,” cried Quentin, “ he’s a fool if he don’t pick up a fortune before he goes back. Why, our city heiresses will be bidding against each other for him.” Constance laughed.

“ We must fix him for dinner as soon as possible. There will be quite a run upon the first consignment of heroes. I will write before I start to-day. By the bye, they want me to be in time for two o’clock luncheon at Richmond, so I must leave at twelve, and,” to her husband, “ pray do not be late for dinner.”

“ And what is Constance to do ?” he asked, kindly.

“ I am to dine with Mary Lisle. *Her* father and mother are going down to the Hexhams’ too, so she has a small party of her own.”

“ Ah ! that’s all right.”

* * * * *

Mrs. Quentin started. Constance, having got but lamely through luncheon and seen the children off for their afternoon walk, returned to the drawing-room, to wait in almost tremulous expectation for her visitor. He would come, of that she felt sure. But why was he coming ? What was it he wanted to speak to her about ? It could not be any avowal of his love for her. That she felt was a thing of the past, not to be touched upon. Not dead, perhaps, but resolutely buried alive, and she must not show herself weaker or more impassioned than the man who had been her lover. Still, she would make the most of this last interview, for it must be the last !

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She moved about the room, rearranging the ornaments and flowers, and paused before a long looking-glass between the windows.

She had deliberately chosen the simplest among her gowns. It was of dark blue woollen stuff, with linen collar and cuffs, as was then the fashion for morning dress. "I look plain and pale enough," she thought, looking at her own reflection. "Alan shall not have his last impression of me as a shallow coquette."

"Mr. Musgrave," said the butler, as this thought crossed her mind. And before the quick throb of her pulse at the sound of his name subsided her hand was in his. He looked taller, thinner, more haggard than the night before. But how delightful it was to look on him again !

"I hope I have not called too early," he began. "I am not very well up in the ways of society, nor quite sure where morning ends and evening begins, for I observe there are no afternoons in London."

"You are in good time, that is all ; and, Alan, how ill you look !"

"I am really improving every day. When I come back from Glengarvon I shall be quite ready for service again."

There was a pause. Then Constance asked, "Do you like India?"

"The country interests me profoundly, and I see that my best chance of a career lies there. I have been very fortunate hitherto, and as soon as I return I hope to get my troop."

"Then you will be Captain Musgrave?"

"Yes," smiling at the exultation in her tone.

"I—we shall watch your progress with pride, Alan," said

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Constance, feeling satisfied with the degree of composure she had attained.

"Thank you. I know I have your good wishes. I——"
He stopped.

"Alan, what is it you have to say to me, to tell me?" she burst out, unable to repress her curiosity. "Does it concern you or me?"

"You, of course. Do you suppose I would intrude my affairs on *you*?" Their eyes met. Hers were full of tears, yet she laughed.

"It is strange to speak of *intruding* your affairs on *me*, is it not, Alan?"

"Strange and bitter," he returned in a low tone. Then, after an instant's pause, added, "I have scarcely courage to go on, for I feel I am taking an unwarrantable liberty. Let me, however, say, that although I must not indulge the madness of the dear old days, I may always be your devoted friend, ready to risk everything, life included, if only I could secure your happiness, your welfare. Do you believe me, Constance?"

"I believe you. I have always believed you."

"Then you will forgive what I am going to say. I have been told, it is generally reported, that you are engaged, and soon to be married to Vivian. I think every one knew *that* was Lady Glengarvon's wish. Will you forgive me if I come to the fountain-head for information and ask you if this is true?"

"I both forgive and will answer you, Alan. I am not engaged to Rex Vivian, but I believe a mere accident has prevented my being his affianced wife. My aunt has set her mind upon it, and apparently so has he. I had almost made up my

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mind—no, they made it up for me (I am so weak)—to yield to their wishes, but I have spoken no irrevocable word. Why do you ask?"

"Because, though the announcement of your marriage to *any* one will never be pleasant reading for me, I would bear it, and hope that your life might be tranquil and happy, were any other man than Vivian your husband. Personally, I dislike him, but this does not influence me in my present speaking."

"If you say distinctly, 'Constance, do not marry this man,' no pressure shall make me," she said, raising her eyes, full of love and confidence, to his.

Musgrave started up and took a turn to and fro.

"Do you think I would dare to ask you for any promise?" he cried. "I am prejudiced against Vivian, but his love for you may make him another man. The reason I have intruded on you, that I have been anxious to know beyond a doubt if it is probable you will marry Vivian, is, that I have some information which may be useful to him, but if *you* had rejected him, or had decided to do so, I should not take the trouble of communicating with him."

"I know Rex Vivian better than any one else, and at times I rather like him, though at other times I do not," she said. "My aunt wishes much for this marriage, and Mrs. Quentin, of whom I am very fond, also, and I don't suppose I shall ever care much about any one. Then I am a very isolated waif. I belong to no one but my aunt, and she does not care much about me, so——" She paused.

"Lady Glengarvon's wishes deserve consideration. But, Constance, you may meet men more suited to you. Less world-hardened and world-worn than Vivian."

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"I do not think he is hard, Alan."

"I see I must not speak against him," said Musgrave.
"His love for you may mould him to your ways."

"If your information may be useful to Mr. Vivian, why not give it to him in any case?"

"I have my reasons, which I cannot now explain, for not speaking."

Constance looked at him steadily, and then averted her eyes. In that moment she determined never to accept Vivian. Now that the true luminary beamed upon her once more, the false and nebulous representative faded out of sight.

"I fear," she said, forcing herself to speak, and feeling Alan's eyes fixed upon her as though he would learn her features by heart, "it will be a hard task to remodel Rex Vivian."

"Tell me where I can find him."

"At this moment he is at Glengarvon, but he meant to return on Monday. His club is 'The Travellers'."

"I don't think a club is exactly the most suitable scene for an interview such as ours is likely to be," said Musgrave, with a grim smile.

"If he is crossed, Rex has rather a violent temper, I believe," said Constance, gravely.

Another pause. Then Musgrave asked some questions about Lady Glengarvon, which led to much talk of the past and their mutual reminiscences. Through it all Constance kept a firm hold on the reins of her self-control, but this grew harder and harder as she felt the gaze of her companion dwelling on her with unspeakable tenderness and grief.

"This will not do!" he exclaimed, starting up at length.

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"Every moment I stay makes the going harder. At least I have the comfort of seeing you delivered from that gloomy old castle and enjoying the place in society you are entitled to. Had it not been in your *own* cause I should never have presumed to trespass upon you. Constance,—yes, I must call you Constance once again!—our roads in life will henceforth be wide apart. But we have both emerged from the sunny, deluding haze of early youth, and life has other aims and rewards than loving and being loved."

"Perhaps. But not for a woman. Oh, Alan, not for a woman!" And she stretched out her hands to him.

"My God, Constance! why do you make me forget my resolutions!" he exclaimed, catching them in both his own and pressing them to his heart. "You will always win and deserve love. I should be a poltroon if I took advantage of your generous noble nature and sought to link your life with mine. We are neither responsible for the love that sprang up between us. But I at least should shield you from any evil which might come of it. I must leave you. You will forget me. Only be happy, and I can bear anything, everything."

"I will obey you, Alan. Your will shall be my law. I will not keep you. We may meet again, but this is our real parting. The very last time that I shall be 'Constance' to you or you 'Alan' to me. Go, my dear old playmate. May God preserve and prosper you. Good-bye."

He kissed her hands passionately and then left her without a word.

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CHAPTER XX.

THE business respecting which Lady Glengarvon was so anxious to consult her "heir presumptive" was really of small importance, and the thrifty baroness would have been not a little shocked had the mental language applied to her by her courteous cousin been given an audible voice.

However, matters were soon settled, and Vivian made himself more than usually agreeable.

They discussed the question of his marriage, and he assured Lady Glengarvon that although she had teased and coquetted with him a good deal he quite believed Constance meant to accept him on his return.

"Then, Rex, get it all finished up as soon as possible. Constance is a good child ; always has been. Since I have been a poor, weak, cranky old woman and not able to go about in my former fashion, I have thought that I did not look after her as I ought. She had a dull time here, and not a very profitable one. But as your wife she will be safe and well placed, and—and happy, if—if any one is happy. For you rather like her. Eh, Rex?"

"Well, my dear baroness, I certainly like her a good deal, or neither prudence nor even your wishes, which I assure you count for a good deal, would induce me to marry her."

"That's well, Rex, that's well ; and she shall not go to you undowered. I have put by a sum for her ; it must be settled on herself, and then you need not impoverish the estate providing for your wife. But I will not give it to her

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if she marries any one but you. I could not bear to think of my hard-earned money going to enrich any one but Glengarvon, as you will be."

"Pray do not trouble yourself on that score. Dowered or dowerless, Constance Morton is the only woman I wish to marry."

"Then settle it all quickly and come down with your wife in August. Then I'll feel that all is safe and well."

"I trust you may be gratified. Indeed, I begin to feel assured you will."

This conversation took place shortly before Lady Glengarvon retired on Sunday night, when Vivian took leave of her, as he was to start at cock-crow next morning.

"She is failing," he mused, as he sat down to complete some notes for a speech he intended to make the following evening, "failing more than I expected. Well, I do not mind how soon I move into the 'upper house.' It may be honourable retirement for the ordinary run of members, but it is better suited to my line than the other house. Diplomats are the better for a coronet, and I shall be no longer dependent on the cursed *canaille* for my seat. 'Rex Vivian l'Estrange, Baron Glengarvon of Glengarvon,' is not a bad handle to one's name. Ah! with a wife like Constance and my own modest merit, I shall give a hitherto unknown lustre to the old titles. I wonder if Constance will ever let herself go? There have been instants when I thought she touched the verge of a passion for me. If I cannot fan it into a flame, how will it end? Shall I grow to hate her if she cools down and lets her curious distrust of me prevail? Well, well, I will try my luck before the week's end. She prom-

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ised me an answer ; she is reflecting upon it now. 'She who deliberates is lost,' and won by me, I hope."

He leant back with half-closed eyes to conjure up before him the sweet mouth, the graceful, rounded form he admired so passionately.

The day was far spent when Vivian reached town, where he found a pile of letters awaiting him, some requiring an immediate reply. It was therefore near dinner-time before he could make his way to his sister's abode. Her drawing-room was, as usual in the afternoon, full of callers, and Constance was trying to entertain a "newly-out" young lady and her youthful admirer, Mr. Dyke. She had some friendly words for Vivian, however, and enquiries for her aunt.

"I'll tell you all about her when you can give me a quiet moment," he said, significantly. "To-night I am due at the House ; to-morrow I am on a committee, and booked for a city dinner. 'The Sword-blade Company' give a grand entertainment to old Mackintosh, who commanded at Chandrapoot, and did something wonderful. We'll all have to speechify. But on Wednesday you must give me a hearing, Constance."

"I will," she returned, very calmly. "Come about four."

"Thanks," said Vivian, struck by an indefinable change in her manner and her unusual paleness. Something had happened,—something inimical to himself.

This vague uneasiness, however, was contemptible folly and weakness, quite unworthy of him. In fact, her ready assent most probably indicated that she had made up her mind to accept him. Still, the time seemed to go slowly, though Vivian had plenty to do next day.

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"The Sword-blade Company's" banquet was the first of many given in honour of those distinguished men who were the first to return from the seat of war, and every one was anxious to secure a place at the splendidly spread board. The usual routine was observed, and the usual number of speeches made. Only the enthusiasm which pervaded the atmosphere gave force and vitality even to the most ordinary utterances.

Vivian, who had to propose the health of "the civilians who had so nobly played their part in the trying vicissitudes of this disastrous outbreak," drew forth thundering plaudits. He had rarely spoken so well, and looked the picture of aristocratic prosperity; but before he resumed his seat, his keen eyes, wandering down the long row of dress-coated men opposite, were caught by the severe attention of a face he recognized, and the sudden shadow of coming defeat fell upon his spirit.

"Young Musgrave, by all that's damnable!" was his mental exclamation; "and she has seen him! No matter. I have still several points in my favour. I'll back myself still against this *parvenu*." Having once perceived his enemy, as he instinctively felt Musgrave to be, he seemed to see no one else, and was struck by the grave composure of his face, when all those around him were full of eager animation. "There's no trace of the country bumpkin left about him. What the devil has sent him here?" Vivian could not tell from his face if Musgrave recognized him or not, but he would, of course, know his name.

At last it was all over or nearly over, and Vivian made his parting bow to his hosts. Talking to the acquaintances

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he encountered on his way to the exit, he made but slow progress, and when he reached the door he found, scarcely to his surprise, that Musgrave was waiting beside it.

"Ah, Mr. Musgrave!" exclaimed Vivian, in his most cordial manner, "welcome back! We are all proud of your success and distinction. I have just returned from Glengarvon, where your name is in every one's mouth."

This address took Musgrave by surprise. He was unprepared for such a tone of frank friendliness.

"You are very good," he returned. "I am home on short sick-leave, which I wish to make as short as possible. India will probably be my country for the future."

"You're right. That way fortune leads. There will be immense changes, and the men on the spot will have the best innings."

"I hope, Mr. Vivian, you will not think me intrusive if I ask you to give me a few minutes' conversation—on a matter which concerns yourself—at your earliest convenience, for I am anxious to go and see my people as soon as possible."

"Intrusive! No, by no means. The son of one of my principal tenants, as your father will be one of these days, you have a claim on my time. Are you engaged this evening?" Musgrave was not. "No time like the present time, then," said Vivian, smiling. "My engagements are unimportant. I'll throw them over. Come with me to my rooms and we'll have a talk." To himself he said, "It's something infernally disagreeable. I'll get it over at once."

"Thank you," said Musgrave, quietly. Mr. Vivian's smart brougham was soon called up, and they were rolling westward.

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Vivian did most of the talking, with incomparable ease, which Musgrave envied.

"What's his secret?" thought the young soldier. "Is it that certainty of position from childhood right through his existence, which gives him the box-seat in life and the guiding grip of the reins? or is it an inherent lightness of nature to which nothing is important? No, there's fire and force in his face. I fancy he would win his game with most women."

"Here we are!" cried Vivian at last, as the carriage stopped, and he led the way to the luxurious dining-room of his bachelor's quarters.

"Cigars, soda water, brandy," was his brief command to his valet. "Put on some wood. One wants a bright fire, but not a hot one, these early spring evenings," he added to his guest.

"And how long have you been in town?" asked Vivian, when his man had left the room.

"About ten days. I am staying with Sir Edward and Lady Everard."

"Ah, yes! the people you helped to save by your gallant defence of Jehadpore——"

"Yes, we were together there. Now, Mr. Vivian, I have rather a long story to tell, and the sooner it is told and you are relieved of my presence the better."

"Go ahead! You are a sensible fellow." And Vivian pushed the bottles towards him. Musgrave declined, and leaning back in his chair began.

"I must speak of myself at first, but that will soon be over. When I started from Bombay little over a month ago I was a wreck, from neglected wounds and fever; but the run across

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to Aden revived me wonderfully. Then the journey across the desert knocked me down again. It is awfully rough work, and it would have been better to have come round by the cape, but I had not the time. I was, therefore, a miserable weakling when I went on board the P. and O. steamer at Alexandria. She was a very unsteady boat, and not too comfortable. One of the under stewards was remarkably good to me, attentive and watchful, and we did a great deal of talking, for I was almost always alone in my cabin. As we neared Marseilles I mentioned that I should land there, and go on *via* Paris to London, as the steamer was most fatiguing ; and after some preliminary apologies my attendant asked me if I would be so good as to take a small parcel for him to his sister who lived in Paris, and was nurse to an invalid gentleman. He had bought her a present, but did not know how to send it on. Well, he gave me the address, and I undertook to perform his commission.

"I was again feeling stronger and better when I reached Paris. The sister of my friend the steward lived in the outskirts, so I drove out and saw her, and gave her a report of her brother.

"When I reached the address given to me, I was told the person I sought was in the garden, and was shown through a court into it by a sort of porteress, who understood a little English."

Here Vivian, who had been listening with a rather indifferent air, seemed to wake up and pay attention.

"She led me to where a respectable matronly-looking woman was sitting under a tree, and beside her in a wheel-chair was her invalid charge. In him, to my immense

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amazement, I recognised the poor imbecile boy, your nephew, Tom Vivian, whom we supposed to be dead."

Vivian looked steadily at Musgrave as he ceased to speak, and then burst out laughing.

"I suppose you fancy you have discovered a mare's-nest of immense proportions," he said. "What more likely than that one imbecile should resemble another? I only know that my nephew is dead and buried, and this other unfortunate is, God knows who! You must bring some better proof, my good sir, than your own casual recollection of a boy whom you had rarely seen."

"I have seen more of him than you know. Of course I did not show my hand to the nurse. I took a seat beside her and spoke of her brother till our attention was attracted by the restlessness of the poor boy. He stretched out his hands to me and strove to speak. I could only make out the words 'dog' and 'whip,' repeated over and over again with a lot of indistinct gabble; but I believe he partially recognised me and wanted to get near me. Mrs. More exclaimed she had never seen him notice any stranger so much before, for, though his health was better than it had been, he was growing more and more idiotic. I then asked some questions about him. His name, she said, was Vandervoort. He was the child of Dutch parents now dead, but he had been born and reared in England. She added that he must belong to rich people, for he had everything he could possibly want."

"I am glad to hear it," broke in Vivian. "But what this story has to do with my deceased nephew I am at a loss to see."

"Hear me to the end and you may perceive the connec-

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tion," said Musgrave, quietly. "The boy's nurse or guardian went on to say that he was periodically visited by a relative of whom he was very fond ; a grand gentleman, a Mr. Smith. He came three or four times a year. An English doctor also visited him about twice a week ; indeed, she expected him then, and he paid all expenses. I shall not trouble you more than a few minutes longer, Mr. Vivian, but hear me to the end.

"I felt stupefied with surprise and inclined to doubt the evidence of my senses ; but that the poor creature before me was the Tom Vivian we believed to be dead I grew more and more convinced. However, I thought it was no affair of mine, so I bid Mrs. More good-bye and returned through the court to find my trap, when as I neared the gateway a gentleman, evidently English, came through it and met me face to face. I recognised him at a glance. It was Dr. Chaldecott. I had often seen him about with young Vivian at Glengarvon. He, however, did not recognise me. I don't suppose he had ever noticed me when he was in the North. This, you must acknowledge, is an extraordinary coincidence. I have done."

"Does it not strike you that you are making rather a fool of yourself by meddling in what does not concern you?" asked Vivian, coolly.

"That depends on the object I have in telling you the story."

"What may that be?" And Vivian watched him keenly as he hesitated to reply, thinking, "What line shall I take, injured innocence or bold confession? He has learned too much ! What infernal ill luck !"

"I don't suppose a fellow of your stamp would want to

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levy black-mail," added Vivian, with a smile, as he chose and lighted a cigar.

"No more than you would yourself. Still, you must give me a promise, or I will make the facts which have come to my knowledge public."

"And what chance would you have of being heard against me?"

"You are a public man, therefore sure to have enemies. Besides, you could never stand an enquiry into this strange story. The boy I saw *is* Tom Vivian. Chaldecott is there to watch over him. The poor idiot himself would recognise *you*, were you brought face to face. You dare not open up the question. I do not want to injure you. I respect the family under which my forbears have held their land. More than anything else, the lad is well cared for and could not be better off than he is. Now I am told that you are to marry Miss Morton, and the promise I ask is that you shall tell her the truth about your nephew before she is your wife. If she loves you, she will forgive this lapse from the right road. Moreover, she is not the woman to betray you. If she marries you, knowing the story, she can never turn on you. If she finds it out after, you'll have a bad time of it."

"Suppose I laugh at your romance and defy you?"

"You can do as you like, but I shall then repeat my tale to Messrs. Sandford & Winter, the law advisers of the late Mr. George Vivian, who were, I think, executors to his will. It would be their business to enquire whether the son of the testator was dead or alive." Vivian was silent and deep in thought, but his facial muscles were under strict control and told his interlocutor nothing. Meantime his brain worked

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rapidly. Which horn of his dilemma should he choose? The cut-and-dried lawyers, who had always shown a thinly-veiled dislike and distrust of him, or this frank and probably impressionable young soldier with his old-world respect for the family he had been trained to look up to? He came quickly to a decision.

"I think, as a soldier and a gentleman, which I believe you are, Musgrave, I will trust you. The boy you saw *is* my nephew. I am not going into the question of my motives; they are nothing to you; but I strongly object to making a clean breast of it to my future wife, as I think I may consider Miss Morton. I do not see that it can do her any good, and she has quixotic ideas in some directions."

"That is a matter I am not going to argue about. But the avowal of that boy's existence to Miss Morton is my sole condition for inviolable secrecy. I think it will be a safeguard for your wife."

"Why? Do you think I shall suppress *her*?" said Vivian, with a sneer. "However, I do not know why I should object. I myself am perfectly satisfied both with my conduct and motives. Yes, I will tell Constance all."

"On your honour as a gentleman?"

"On my honour," repeated Vivian, his brow contracting, his eyes darkening with anger at the position into which he had been forced.

"Now, Musgrave, I want an answer from you. Have you seen Miss Morton since your return?"

"I have,—twice," was the instant reply. "Once for a few minutes at the Duchess of G——'s ball; once during a brief visit at Mrs. Quentin's house."

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"Indeed! And, why at my sister's?"

"Because I ventured to ask for a few minutes' private conversation. I wanted to hear from her own lips if she were going to be married to you or not."

"What right had you to presume?"

"None whatever. But I risked a sharp rebuke because I knew she would believe I was solely influenced by the purest, sincerest interest in her welfare. Had she told me there was no probability of her being your wife, I should never have uttered a word of this story to you,—to any one."

"But—she acknowledged that in all probability she would be my wife?" eagerly.

"Miss Morton said it was an accident that had prevented your being already engaged to her."

"She said that! Well, Musgrave, I dare say the county gossip has informed you that Lady Glengarvon particularly wishes the marriage, and none can imagine better than yourself how ardently I desire it. You have proved yourself no common man, but I must say that not so very long ago I should like to have sent a bullet through you for your audacity in raising your eyes so far above you as to presume to make love to Constance Morton."

Musgrave listened with a slight, thoughtful smile, as if dispassionately considering the position.

"I was wrong from every point of view. I was old enough to have exercised more self-control, to have known that I could only have given her pain; but the temptation was too strong, and yielded to in one overpowering moment. How could I draw back while she scarcely knew whether I was brother or lover? However, I did my best to efface

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myself, and I have passed out of her mind, her life, forever."

"You are a curious fellow ! but you have most of your own life still to live. When do you return to India?"

"I shall start in three or four months. I want to travel back through Italy. It is probably the only chance I shall have to see the places I have read of and wished to visit."

"One word more on this rather uncomfortable subject. Have you told Constance why you were so anxious to ascertain if she were pledged to me?"

"No ; I gave her no hint. You shall have all the benefit of a free confession. *If* she marries you, the better she loves you, the more she trusts you, the happier she will be."

"Still, there is something I cannot quite understand about you. Is there no subtle belief that Miss Morton will break with me on account of this wretched idiot?"

"On that point I am not sure of myself, but I am quite sure that you ought to tell her. If you do not, I will. I frankly admit I would rather see Miss Morton married to any other man of decent character than yourself. Putting aside the artificial barriers of society, I am far fitter to be her husband than you are. Heart to heart, life to life, we are more equal. But rebellion against the laws of society is folly. Moreover, Miss Morton, with her present knowledge of the world, would be the first to see the depth and breadth of the gulf circumstances have fixed between us. You can place her in the position for which birth and nature have destined her. God grant you may be true to her and make her life peaceful and happy. She will deserve this at your hands if she marries you."

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"Your frankness is flattering. I cannot sufficiently admire it. I well remember the former occasion on which you compared me with yourself, considerably to my disadvantage. Considering that I hope soon to call Miss Morton my wife, it is not a very agreeable reminiscence."

Musgrave thought for an instant, and the colour rose to his sunburnt cheek. "We may all blot out that passage from our memories." He rose as he spoke. "I shall now relieve you of my presence, which cannot be very pleasant. I have acted to the best of my judgment, and I do not suppose that you and I shall ever meet again."

"I sincerely hope not!" cried Vivian, restraining himself with some difficulty. "You have, I don't doubt, enjoyed what you probably think my humiliation. But if so, you are entirely mistaken. I have only done what would have been perfectly legal had there been a grain of common sense in our laws affecting succession."

"No, we are not likely to enjoy each other's society," returned Musgrave, with a grim smile and a composure quite equal to Vivian's. "I wish you good-night."

He bowed stiffly and left the room with much deliberation.

"Infernal, insolent, brutal plebeian!" said Vivian to himself as he walked to and fro, in a fury with himself and with the cross destiny which brought Musgrave face to face with the poor idiot who had been swept out of the way. "The last man on earth at whose mercy I would choose to be. Yet he will not betray me. He has a stern sense of honour. I fancy his word is his bond. I suppose he despises me as a self-seeking, corrupt aristocrat. I don't care a damn what he thinks. What does his narrow life know of the necessities,

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the temptations, of an existence such as mine? He does not count." Yet the thought of Musgrave's opinion rankled like a poisoned arrow in the wound it had made.

And Constance! What an awful ordeal lay before him! The charge at Balaklava was mere child's play compared to it. Still, there was a gleam of comfort in Musgrave's conviction that Constance meant to marry him. Yet even from *this* the guilt had been taken by Musgrave's discovery. Vivian felt beaten, trampled upon, defeated, as he never felt before in his varied experience. Deep and deadly were the curses he heaped upon the insolent underling who had dared to beard him. If—if only he were knocked down, run over, and his life crushed out that very night, as he walked back to his abode, then Vivian would once more believe in his own luck. As it was, he must get through that interview with Constance as soon as possible.

He sat down and wrote a hasty note.

"DEAR CONSTANCE,—I hope you will receive me *without fail* to-morrow, between two and three o'clock.

"Yours ever,

"R. V."

Then he rang and ordered it to be taken early next morning.

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CHAPTER XXI.

CONSTANCE MORTON was somewhat surprised by her own composure as she awaited the coming of Vivian the following day.

A mist seemed to have been cleared from her eyes, a cloud of perplexing uncertainty from her heart. The right way was suddenly revealed to her, and she resolved to walk in it. Yet she shrank from inflicting pain, and she was still a little afraid of Vivian, but the fear had lost the curious, attractive, compelling power it used to exercise upon her.

Mrs. Quentin had left her with the full knowledge that on the impending interview hung the question whether Constance was to be her sister-in-law or not. "And I am sure I do not know which I wish," thought the shrewd little woman, as she started in her neat victoria to pay visits and leave cards.

Constance looked very colourless and grave when she rose to meet Rex.

"You have been overdoing your gaities, Constance," he said, looking at her eagerly. "You are white and heavy-eyed."

"An uncomplimentary greeting, Rex," drawing her hand gently from his close grasp.

"Between you and me compliments do not exist."

He drew a chair near hers, and a pause ensued.

"I find it deucedly hard to begin what I have to say to you, Constance," he said at last.

"I cannot imagine your finding anything of that kind a

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difficulty," she returned, raising her eyes to his with a slight kindly smile.

"You know why I have come here to-day," he resumed. "But before I ask your answer to the most momentous question a man can put to a woman, I should like—no, not like—in fact, I should rather not tell you an incident of my life. I feel you ought to know it before you decide for or against me."

"Stay, Rex! I do not wish to hear any confession," cried Constance, flushing quickly. "It would not be fair to listen to what you might afterwards regret having told me."

Vivian hesitated and thought rapidly. "Was she going to reject him? No." He had a deep-rooted conviction that she had a half-resisted weakness for him; that his eyes, his touch, could stir her blood and send it swiftly to her heart, her cheek! He had sworn to himself to overcome whatever it was in her that held out against him. Perhaps this voluntary confidence, this giving of himself into her hands, would touch her. "And at any rate," was his concluding reflection, "if I do not tell her that infernal young prig Musgrave will; with the addition that I promised to do so on my word of honour and broke it."

"No, Constance. Whatever you do, I should like you to know the worst of me. Not, remember, that I am in the least ashamed of what I have done; but you shall judge." He paused. Then, after a minute's thought, resumed: "I must go back to your brown holland frock days, Constance. What a refrigerated, unresponsive young creature you were, and how you hated me!"

"And how disagreeable *you* were, Rex!"

"I suppose so. Well, I was in a very trying position; a

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position not calculated to develop the milk of human kindness. On the one hand, the money, lands, and title of your aunt were sure to be mine ; on the other, the very considerable fortune of my unhappy nephew would also come to me, for my brother George bequeathed a handsome sum to his wife and the residue to the child which was expected, whether boy or girl. Mrs. Vivian died intestate, and all was inherited by Tom. Meantime, while the grass grew the steed starved. I was deeply in debt ; I had very little ready money. The old square-toes who had the control of Tom's fortune disliked and distrusted me, and altogether the situation was intolerable. Besides (I may confess it to you *now*), I was very anxious to avoid marrying *you*. Imagine such a frame of mind ! Matrimony never had any attractions for me, I confess, till lately. Well, I was in a mood for any deviltry, all the more because no one knew the predicament in which I stood. Of course, if my true position became known to my brother's executors, they would have made some legal objection to my exercising the rights of a guardian or something else that was damnably disagreeable. I think, Constance, you must know me well enough to judge *what* an inferno this was for me."

He went on to describe his walk up Regent Street, mentioned in the beginning of this tale, during which he racked his brain for some way out of the dilemma. To be worsted by a couple of rigid, pettifogging lawyers was intolerable. Moreover, there were deeper reasons for the state of uneasy and indignant impatience which just then irritated him to recklessness,—reasons which he preferred keeping to himself. He continued his story, which must be curtailed.

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On reaching the circus his attention was caught by the miserable, half-witted creature who swept the crossing there ; the curious likeness between this wretched waif, one of the last dregs of a city's refuse, and the carefully watched and tended heir of rank and riches, struck Vivian, to use his own words, as something positively providential.

The idea which then suggested itself to him germinated rapidly. His first step was to take his friend Dr. Chaldecott into his confidence. Over this chum Vivian possessed a strong influence. He knew the young man was poor, ambitious, and deeply in love. He already knew Vivian's straits, and believed firmly in his capability and power to rise above his difficulties and raise his friend with him, though almost struck dumb by Vivian's bold scheme. This was to get possession of the poor crossing-sweeper, on the plea of trying a new cure for his terrible cough. Dr. Chaldecott only appearing and posing as a benevolent physician, whose object was to relieve the sufferings of the poor.

Once in their hands, Chaldecott would take him to some obscure little place in one of the south coast counties, where he should have all possible care and comfort until he was required to play his part.

Meantime, the real Simon Pure was apparently drooping in the keen air of Glengarvon, and both guardians consulted gravely with Dr. Chaldecott and the local Æsculapius as to the advisability of taking him to the south coast. Needless to say, that move was decided on.

Young Vivian's valet was next dismissed, and as a favour allowed to accompany him part of the way. Chaldecott went to Bournemouth to prepare apartments and engage a nurse for

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his charge, and then, to the poor boy's delight, Vivian himself accompanied his ward on the journey.

On the second day (for they travelled slowly) the valet left them, and when within a short distance of their destination, at a small station, Chaldecott with the substitute for the original imbecile joined them.

"This was the first moment of difficulty," continued Vivian, with increasing animation. It seemed to Constance that he enjoyed recalling his own ingenuity and management.

"Poor Tom was most troublesomely fond of me, and objected strongly to my leaving him. If he made a row and drew the attention of the railway officials, it might be a fatal point in any future enquiry, should the question ever be raised. I therefore had to make a rapid change of plans. Chaldecott and his idiot came on in the same train with me and mine, and most fortunately the poor creature was so weary that by the time we reached Bournemouth he was desperately sleepy. We had arranged that Chaldecott should take lodgings for Tom in an out-of-the-way part of the town and an attendant; and here I conveyed my ward, while Chaldecott escorted the other fellow to the hotel, and said I was detained at the station, having to send several telegrams. A good dinner was ready for Tom, and you know how greedy he is. So soon as he was engaged in devouring I slipped away.

"I must say I was highly pleased with the appearance of idiot No. 2. There was quite enough likeness to fit in with a description of my nephew, but I am not sure that any one who knew Tom Vivian would have been taken in. Anyhow, the poor devil looked bad enough. Even so, the month or

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six weeks of cleanliness and decency had done wonders for him. He was physically weaker than our boy, but the crossing-sweeper had a little more sense."

Constance had listened almost in silence, save for an irrepressible exclamation here and there. Now she broke out: "Oh, Rex, don't go on! I dread to hear that you have been guilty of some cruelty. Nothing seems to stop you." And she covered her face with her hands.

Vivian looked, with a slight smile. "My dear girl," he exclaimed, "do you think I should be such a double-distilled idiot as to do any harm to the poor boy? I am by no means cruel by nature, and I would not have robbed my nephew of the smallest comfort or luxury. Oh, no, I did not need strong measures.

"We had rather a hard time. Just then both Chaldecott and I had to be frequently with Tom, who did not take much to his new nurse or female valet. However, we managed to get him up to London. No place like London for keeping out of sight. Then we got Sir William G——, the great man for chest diseases, to come down and see Tom's double. That cost a rousing fee. He advised our trying to get him away to the Riviera, in good time and easy stages; so—— But you remember my letters to your aunt, our care and precautions. At any rate, death was made as easy to our poor pauper as ever it was to a prince of the blood. I consulted Sir William G—— as to the best man to call in as we rested in Paris, were it necessary, and he wrote the name of the embassy doctor on the back of his own card. Well, we started and reached Paris in good order, but our invalid was greatly shaken. I sent at once for the doctor recommended.

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I was dying to get away from Paris, it was such a dangerous place. But the doctor advised our taking a few days' rest. Well, the third night of our stay, in a violent fit of coughing, our precious charge broke a blood-vessel, and all was soon over.

"You know the rest. My kind attentions to my afflicted nephew were supposed to do me infinite credit. Chaldecott and I brought back the remains with all due respect, and the poor crossing-sweeper was buried in the family vault of the haughty, high-born Vivians! Oh, Constance, what an extraordinary masquerade life is! How unreal is everything save what ministers to one's personal enjoyment!"

"Then what became of Tom?" asked Constance.

"Tom is exceedingly well; better than I have known him for years. He has a pleasant abode in sunny Paris, with a big garden. He has a good, kindly, rather superior English woman to take care of him, with a couple of servants under her, and I—I have, as I ought, possession of his fortune. I am free to go my own way and live a new life, as I do. Providence, you see, my sweet one, is always on the side of the biggest battalions; for I had pluck, invention, resource, and kept to my favourite maxim, 'Be bold!' These are big battalions, Constance. Now, there is my story. I felt it would not be right to leave you in ignorance of this secret. You will see that I have done no real wrong. You will also see how utterly I trust you, for I have not only given myself away, but also my friend Chaldecott. Yet I do not fear; you are not the stuff of which traitors are made. Speak to me, Constance."

"Rex, I am too amazed, too disappointed, to know what to say."

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"How do you mean?"

"Oh, Rex, it was all very clever and daring, but—it was not the act of a gentleman. It was more like the deed of some out-at-elbows card-sharper!"

"Well, so it was, almost. For cheating at cards was an intellectual exercise which never recommended itself to me. But I was certainly out at elbows. No, my dear Constance, the imperfection of the law drove me to take law into my own hands. The property of an unfortunate creature like my nephew ought, after making an ample provision for his wants, be handed over to the rightful owner,—that is, his next of kin,—and not be let to lie fallow at the mercy of executors who enjoy circumventing the heir."

He proceeded to argue ingeniously and eloquently, but in vain. Constance was firm in her opinion that his conduct was unworthy a gentleman.

"Do not think, however, that I will betray you. It would be treachery to my aunt, to your sister, to the whole family. No, I will carefully guard the secret, *that* you may be sure of. Why, what induced you to tell me, Rex? I cannot understand it."

He looked keenly at her.

"I wished to stand before you in my true colours before you answer the momentous—momentous to me—question I am about to ask you. I hoped, I believed, your mind was wide enough and strong enough to rise above vulgar prejudices and see this rather unusual line of conduct in its real light."

"I think these vulgar prejudices are very essential to the safety of society, Rex. If every one found some broad-minded reason for doing what suited his own interests or his

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desires, there would be a great deal more injustice than even already goes on."

"I did not know you were such a philosopher, Constance."

"I don't fancy I have much philosophy, but I am awfully sorry you did this thing, Rex."

"Could I have let you marry me with your eyes shut, Constance?"

"That would indeed have been wrong. But, Rex, did you feel sure I would marry you?"

"Sure, no! but there were times when I had heavenly glimpses of hope, and you are too candid to deny that occasionally you were favourably disposed towards me." He changed his seat for one beside her, and, taking her hand, looked caressingly into her face, his speaking eyes full of passionate entreaty. "These variations of mood have been very trying to me, Constance."

She grew white as various incidents of their intercourse flashed through her mind on the electric wires of memory. Had she, through vanity and weakness, and an unworthy liking for this man's admiration, given him the right to think her a cold-hearted coquette? To atone for this, was she bound to sacrifice herself? Right or wrong, she could not now marry Rex Vivian, whatever the consequences of her refusal. "Yes, I have liked you. I do like you, and I am very grateful to you for your kindness to me, Rex."

"That is all nonsense," he broke in. "To do anything for you is to gratify myself. You have mastered me, as no other woman ever did. I cannot explain why, but there it is. Your coldness, the glimpses you sometimes give of a possible heaven, the something in you that answers to me at

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times—— No, no words of mine can say how passionately I long to call you my own, to know that you belong to me. Listen, Constance.” And he rushed into a vivid description of her own possible future as his wife, or barely existing on sufferance with her aunt in arms against her because she would not accept the husband provided by Lady Glengarvon, insisting that her aunt would make but slight provision for a rebellious niece. “And what could you do, my love, my queen? You have in a sense been hardly brought up, but you know nothing of the world’s hardness. What could you do to add to the infinitesimal income, which is all you could hope for?”

“I should make a tolerably good nursery governess,” said Constance, thoughtfully.

Vivian burst out laughing. “It is impossible to listen seriously,” he said. “Tell me, Constance, have you really and truly turned against me because of my conduct to Tom Vivian?”

“I do not know how that would have affected me, Rex, had I really loved you. I should have been dreadfully distressed; but love must make a great difference.”

“And you do *not* love me?” broke in Vivian.

“No; I do not find real love in my heart for you,” she said, slowly and reluctantly.

He started up and began to pace the room.

“I understand the position at last,” he said, his brows drawn together in an ominous frown. “You have seen your rustic lover, and the old folly has taken possession of you.”

“You are right, I think,” she said, after a brief pause. “The meeting with Alan Musgrave, short as it was, brought

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me to myself. I loved him more truly than I thought. Do not imagine, however, that I am going to give myself up to vain dreams. I shall strive hard to banish this—this weakness. In time I shall succeed, for probably we shall never see each other again. But for the present, Rex, it would be desecration, it would be base disloyalty, to marry any other man. Forgive me any pain I may give you ; forgive me if I unconsciously misled you.”

“ Was it *quite* unconsciously ?” he asked, sternly.

“ I believe it was. And, Rex, you have everything the world can give. You have a splendid career before you, if you choose. Surely you can put me out of your mind and seek some girl fairer, younger, fresher than I am, who will give you an undivided heart.”

“ Thanks. I should prefer recovering yours piecemeal. However, it is useless to speak to you now. One word of warning : do not strain my powers of endurance too far. I am an unpleasant enemy, and, as you know now, not too scrupulous in attaining my ends. Love that is passion shot with revenge is a devilish mixture.”

“ Forewarned is forearmed, Rex,” said Constance, uprearing her head. “ At any rate, I am not an idiot. I can at least assert my own identity.”

His answer was to clasp her in his arms, and, in spite of her vehement struggles, he showered his fiery kisses on her brow, her cheek, her throat. Then, suddenly releasing her, he left the room.

Constance stood a moment breathless with indignation, astonishment, and a vague pity for the man she both condemned and feared.

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CHAPTER XXII.

No possible termination of their interview could have been more unfortunate for Vivian's interests, so far as Constance was concerned, than the uncontrolled outbreak to which he had yielded.

Trembling with anger at his want of respect and stunned by his extraordinary confession, she ran away to her room, to try and marshal her thoughts and regain self-mastery.

Even Barbara found no admittance. This extraordinary revelation must be an inviolable secret. Vivian deserved to be punished, but her Aunt Elizabeth and Mrs. Quentin did not, and they, should the story ever come to light, would suffer infinitely more than Rex could. Never again could she idealise him. The clothing of strength and resolution, of inborn command inherited from an ancient race of chivalrous high spirit with which her imagination bedecked him, fell off in wretched rags and left the cynical figure of a shameless cheat. She was cruelly disappointed. Vivian in later days had interested her deeply. She confessed to herself that but for the deep attachment which had grown with her growth for Alan Musgrave she might have reciprocated Vivian's passion for her warmly enough, and then how unhappy she would have been! So she was now, but it was a different unhappiness. Vivian was quite apart from her life now. Yet she could not help being sorry for him.

She never wished to see him again. And as to marrying him! Even had he remained all and more than her fancy painted him, she could never have married him. No, it was

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impossible to say what changes time might bring, but for many a day Musgrave alone of all the world of men could be her lover, her husband. Here her meditations were broken by a knock at the door.

"Do please, miss, let me in! You have barely time to dress for dinner!" cried Barbara, outside.

"Why, what hours I have sat here!" exclaimed Constance, rising to let her faithful attendant in.

"I began to be afraid you were ill, miss!" cried Barbara, as she began to spread out her mistress's dress and etceteras for dinner. "I ventured to tap twice at the door, but you took no notice. And, dear me, 'm, you do look ill, white as white, and your eyes red. What shall we do to get them right?"

"Plenty of cold water, Barbara, will restore me sufficiently."

"Well, I hope so, miss. Let me ask Mrs. Quentin for some rose-water, or milk of roses; it's a beautiful thing for the skin. And you know there's a French count and countess coming to-night to dinner, and you ought to look well. I heard Mrs. Quentin say, just as I passed her and Mr. Quentin in the hall, that she was so vexed Mr. Vivian could not come to dinner, as he spoke French well."

"I am very thankful he cannot," exclaimed Constance. "Please, Barbara, do not mention Mr. Vivian unless I speak first of him."

"Certainly not, miss, if you desire it," in a slightly awed tone, and evidently much surprised.

"Oh, Barbara, I wish I could go to bed and sleep! I am so tired."

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"Dear, dear, miss, that would never do. Now let me dress your hair, Miss Constance. You have only half an hour, and I want the French lady to see we are not out-and-out barbarians in England."

"Give me my black lace dress with the old paste buckles."

"Law, miss, that makes you look so old."

"That is of no consequence, Barbara. I feel a hundred."

"I wonder what's gone wrong?" was Barbara's mental comment, as she went on swiftly with her mistress's toilet.

The dinner and evening tried Constance greatly. The effort to give her attention to what was going on about her, to answer brightly and to the point when spoken to, to be a help to her kind hostess instead of a dead weight, was an immense effort, while her thoughts were incessantly reverting to Vivian's extraordinary revelations, her widening circles of wonder now enclosing Dr. Chaldecott, who had been so great a favourite with her. How could an honourable man lend himself to so unworthy a plot? How was it that he was open to temptation of so base a kind? Her disenchantment was complete all round.

"Are you quite well, Constance?" asked Mrs. Quentin when her guests were gone, and she sat by the fire, opening some notes which had come by the last post. "You are looking so pale and dazed. I trust you will be able to go to Lady D——'s 'theatricals.' They will be most amusing."

"Oh, yes; of course I shall, Mrs. Quentin. I have a sort of headache; nothing worth mentioning."

"Pray wait till you go to Glengarvon to be indisposed," laughing. "I am in daily dread of your recall, and I am afraid you must not refuse if your aunt wants you. We shall

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miss you dreadfully." A pause, while she continued to glance through her notes and consign them to the waste-paper basket. "I am so sorry," resumed Mrs. Quentin, "Mr. Musgrave cannot dine with us on Wednesday. He is going out of town, to pass the larger part of his stay in England with his people. And I had arranged such a nice, bright party! I am out of luck. I don't know when Rex failed me before. I fancy *you* are to blame for it, Constance. Rex paid you a long visit to-day?"

"He did," returned Constance, nerving herself for an explanation, her colour varying, her eyes cast down.

"Well, dear, I do not like to be intrusive, but both for your sake and his I am sincerely anxious to know how matters stand between you."

"You have a right to know, dear Mrs. Quentin. I—I am very sorry, but I cannot marry your brother!"

"No! Well, I am very sorry, too, Constance. I never quite thought you would. But I really believe he might have made you a good husband, and, as far as a settlement goes, you could hardly have done better. Your aunt will be awfully vexed. I wish you could have pleased her and all of us, dear. Rex is very fond of you, very. But the general 'cussedness' of fate is such that one never can fit the pieces of the puzzle together."

"That is true, indeed, dear Mrs. Quentin. I heartily wish I could have pleased you,—*you* especially. Indeed, you are wonderfully good to be so ready to adopt me,—for I have nothing and am nobody,—when Rex might marry rank and riches and everything!"

"They are not everything," said Mrs. Quentin, thoughtfully,

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"though they are a great deal. I am considered a worldly woman,—and I am,—but I married for love, and I have never regretted it. To some—they are not many—rank and wealth and power are mere dust and ashes without love and tenderness. I fancy you are one of these, Constance. Still, the world of society and politics and art and literature is very delightful. *You* will never be indifferent to it."

"I do not suppose I ever shall. Nor shall I ever cease to be grateful for your delightful initiation into it, which, by the way, I really owe to Mr. Vivian originally."

"Yes,"—Mrs. Quentin paused and laughed pleasantly,—"I well remember my dismay when he first proposed that I should invite you to stay here, and how soon I grew reconciled to you. Why, Constance, my dear! what is the matter?" For Constance had burst into tears and struggled in vain for self-control. It was a most extraordinary breakdown for her. She was in no way hysterical or tearful, but the day's long strain had been too much for her.

"I am awfully ashamed of myself, dear Mrs. Quentin," she said, brokenly. "I do not know what is the matter with me. I shall go away to bed, and to-morrow you shall find me quite myself."

"Very well. Sleep is the best restorative. Only, let me beg you not to decide too hastily on what you may afterwards regret. Good-night, my dear." And Mrs. Quentin kissed her young guest kindly,—an unusual manifestation, for she was not a demonstrative woman.

The weeks which succeeded this stormy day were perhaps the most trying of her life to Constance. A profound sense of her own loneliness pressed upon her. She belonged to

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no one, and she had not a penny in the world she could call her own, nor the means of making one. It is true she had not been luxuriously brought up, but she had been trained in the tradition, the seclusion of aristocratic habits, and to mix with indiscriminate strangers and to battle for her bread was to her an appalling prospect. Yet by refusing Rex Vivian she offended the only creature on whom she had the shadow of a claim and vexed the only real friends she possessed. Still, she lingered on with the Quentins, though the "season" with its varying interests and amusements had lost all its charm for her. It was awkward and trying to meet Vivian, as she constantly did. The attraction he once possessed for her had changed into a sense of indignant disgust, since he had dared to snatch those kisses from her, and although nothing could be more admirable than his self-possession, his chivalrous courtesy, she seemed to see, by some mental "Röntgen rays," through the outer husk of fair seeming to the inner unsightly skeleton.

But she shrank from returning to Glengarvon ; she felt sure from the coldness and brevity of her aunt's letters that she was in disgrace. No doubt Vivian had told the baroness of his rejection, and probably it was due to his intercession that she had not received a stern rebuke. How she hated to owe anything to him ! But far beyond this motive for keeping away from her home was the fear of disturbing Alan's visit to his own people. He would not stay to risk meeting her, and she herself dared not taste the perilous joy of seeing him face to face. Those brief encounters had so revived and intensified her love for him that she would have blushed for herself had not her trust, her faith, her deep respect for the man into whom

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her boyish lover had developed, had given strength and dignity to her affection. And Alan was right,—they must not yield to a passion which every circumstance of their position forbade, especially to him. Never again would she draw upon herself that appeal which so roused her conscience and her pride,—“Do not tempt me!” No, she would religiously avoid her beloved. She would never vex him with her presence. Yet that cruel hunger of the heart to see him, to hear his voice, to ask his counsel on every little hesitation of her own judgment, how it eat into her soul! Over and above every other consideration, the desire to spare Alan determined her to stay in town as long as ever Mrs. Quentin would keep her or Lady Glengarvon would let her stay.

So the weeks slipped past. Miss Morton was seen everywhere,—everywhere, at least, that Mrs. Quentin went, and she never racketed about as much as other people. Society said that Constance Morton was “going off.” She was less brilliant, less rich in her colouring. Perhaps that delightful erratic creature, Rex Vivian, was playing fast and loose with her, or, the supposed engagement was a family arrangement, a move of Lady Glengarvon’s to provide a proper position for her adopted daughter, and Vivian was getting a little bored with it.

April and part of May had passed and Constance was still uncertain and unsettled. “Barbara,” she said, one soft sweet spring morning, as they sat under the trees in Hyde Park watching the children sailing their boats and feeding the ducks on the Serpentine,—“Barbara, suppose you and I were suddenly turned out on the world, what should we do? I mean, to earn our bread.”

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"Why, Miss Constance, what do you mean?" in a tone of great surprise.

"I am trying to build a cottage in the air, that's all," Barbara. "You are always sure of earning your bread. But what would become of me?"

"You, miss?" returned Barbara, entering into what she considered her mistress's fun. "You'd have to go out as an 'improver,' to learn, you know; for though you have a very good idea of needlework, you have a great deal to learn, and, of course, you would get but poor pay."

"How much could we live on, Barbara?"

"I don't think I can quite say. I am a very poor house-keeper, miss. We might get a decently furnished room for ten shillings a week."

"That seems a great deal," said Constance, much to her attendant's surprise. "I thought rooms such as we would want would be much cheaper. I think you and I could live very happily together."

"That we could, miss, if we had anything to live *on*. But to have nothing at all but what you can make is no joke, I can tell you, Miss Constance. It means, at best, your first week on credit, and it's not many ever get over that."

"Life seems very hard. But you, Barbara, you could soon get a better place than you have with us."

"Oh, well, Miss Constance, I might, as far as money goes. But I am happy—at least, it's not your fault if I am not—and comfortable, and I do hope and trust you are not going to send me away." And she looked imploringly at her mistress.

"I will tell you all I think, Barbara. I must go back to Glengarvon before long, though I do not want to go."

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"No, nor I either, miss. Did her ladyship mention that *Mister Macpherson* will be leaving shortly?"

"No."

"Well, I had a letter from Mrs. Wylie two days ago, and she says Macpherson leaves on the 22d and will be married the 25th. She also says what a fuss every one has made over Mr. Musgrave. The Rockingham paper had a long account of him. But you were saying, Miss Constance, that you must go back to Glengarvon."

"Yes, Barbara, and I shall be in deep disgrace. I have been thinking that, as I have vexed and contradicted my aunt, I have no right to put her to any expense I can avoid."

"Yes, miss, I understand," significantly.

"So I have almost made up my mind to offer you up as a sacrifice,—*my* sacrifice."

"Well, Miss Constance dear, please do nothing of the kind. I'm not speaking for myself, though I should be a miserable creature if I left you, but for your own sake. Her ladyship is as rich as rich, and she wouldn't thank you or think a bit the better of you if you gave me up. Then before long you'd want to go to town or to some grand house, and you'd have to get another, who'd cost more than me, and never watch over you or look after you as, I will say, I've done." And Barbara's honest brown-grey eyes grew moist.

"No, indeed, Barbara. Your care and thought for me are what no money could buy and no money can pay," said Constance, warmly, laying her hand on her maid's.

"If her ladyship has adopted you, she has a right to provide what's fit and proper. Don't send me away from you,

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Miss Constance. It makes me feel as if there was no life for me anywhere."

"Then I will *not*, Barbara, unless Aunt Elizabeth wishes it. To me Glengarvon would indeed be desolate without you. Let us wait what the fates send us." She rose as she spoke.

"Well, 'm," said Barbara, "whatever you think best for yourself, go or stay, I am ready to do. But I want to stay. Oh, I want to stay!"

"Thank you, Barbara. I am really grateful to you. My aunt says she has had a cold which is rather obstinate."

"Yes, 'm," returned Barbara, as they walked towards Stanhope Gate. "Mrs. Wylie tells me her ladyship has been rather poorly. She would go out one day last week in a bad northeast wind, and she caught a chill."

"My poor aunt! I wonder does she ever feel the need of human help and sympathy?"

"God alone knows, miss. She hasn't a bad heart if she wasn't so afraid of spending a half-penny."

Constance had lingered so long in the Park that she was late for luncheon.

"Come along, Con!" cried Mrs. Quentin. "Where have you been wandering? Have a *cotelette à la jardinière*. You must be hungry."

Constance soon finished her luncheon.

"Holland," said Mrs. Quentin to her butler, "there were some letters for Miss Morton, were there not?"

"Yes, 'm. I will bring them." He returned with a couple on a salver.

"Ah!" cried Constance. "This is from Madame Clothilde. I haven't the courage to open it. This—I do not

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know the writing." She tore it open, grew very white, and handed it to Mrs. Quentin, who read,—

"TO MISS MORTON. DEAR MADAM,—Lady Glengarvon is seriously ill. I should advise your coming home at once."

This was signed by the local doctor.

"The second summons!" cried Mrs. Quentin. "Of course you must go at once."

"Of course," echoed Constance. "I only wish I had asked leave to return long ago."

"It is impossible to foresee. I wish Dr. Barnes had said what the nature of her illness is."

"Something very serious indeed, I fear. Barbara heard from Wylie a day or two ago that my aunt had a cold."

"It is useless to conjecture. You will have ample time to pack up and catch the mail-train."

"Yes, Mrs. Quentin. And I shall take all my belongings; for when I go to Glengarvon this time I shall stay there. I shall not leave Aunt Elizabeth again. Oh, Mrs. Quentin! do you think Mr. Vivian will go?" She never called him Rex now.

"Not unless the baroness sent for him. At all events, he will not be in your way. How white and ill you look, you poor child! If Lady Glengarvon is very ill, I will send that nurse she liked so much to her. I will come myself if you wish it, Constance."

"Ah, Mrs. Quentin, *that* would be best of all!"

The rest of the day passed over with the strange combination of fast and slow which marks the mixture of dread and impatience of such times. "Seriously ill" might mean anything. How Constance wished she had returned with her

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aunt and had never left her! She had thought too much of herself, too little of her only relative. For though her late father had brothers and a sister, none of them had taken any trouble about his orphan daughter.

The strange day of hurry and delay, of confusion and ill-repressed dread, wore through. Vivian paid a hurried visit to his sister on receiving a note from her which she thought it her duty to send him.

He did not see any necessity, he said, for going to Glen-garvon as long as the baroness did not wish to see him. Whenever she did he would go at once.

It was a fine, dry, mild night when Mr. and Mrs. Quentin accompanied Constance to the station to bid her good-bye and cheer her to the best of their power.

To the last Constance strained her eyes to see their kind faces as best she could by the lamp-light till darkness swallowed them up, and then, rolling herself in her cloak, leant back in her corner, feeling vaguely but strongly that she was hurrying away to open a new and eventful page in her book of life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"BARBARA'S ACCOUNT."

I SHALL never forget that journey. I had the strangest feeling that I was going away into an unknown country, and yet I was as familiar with the place as if I had been born there, and fond of it in a way, too, only it couldn't be quite pleasant for me to go back just two days before Jim Macpher-

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son was to be married. He had given me a bitter cup to drink, but I was chiefly vexed with myself. I had heard enough about the love-affairs of other girls when I was at Madame Clothilde's to know that I was not the sort men liked. No one offered to keep company with me, and I was fool enough to be a bit hurt. But I *used* to have the sense to comfort myself by thinking that all my girl friends were fond of me, and trusted me to that degree that they gave me no end of trouble. However, when Macpherson began to make love to me I lost my head. I believed every word he said. Ah, it was nice! to think that any one cares for you, lives for you! It's enough to make an angel of a woman, trying to live up to what your true lover thinks you are. Anyway, I made the best of myself for more than six months for nothing. Thank God, after a bit the bitterness began to die away, and I saw a glimmer of light first, thinking how good God had been in showing me the real Macpherson before I had vowed to love and cherish him till death us did part. Then I made a vow to myself never to think of love or marriage again, and I have kept it, though I have had offers enough; but that's another bit of my story, and I must not anticipate.

Nothing helped me to forget my own troubles so much as seeing my dear Miss Constance bearing hers so bravely. I thought it just the unluckiest turn that ever happened her meeting that Mr. Musgrave. It quite put Mr. Vivian out of her head and heart. Though, as far as I myself am concerned, if she had married Mr. Vivian, it would have made matters far harder for me afterwards, hard as they were.

It was a fine, warm night, and Miss Constance slept a good bit off and on. I was very wakeful. Somehow, I never

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expected Lady Glengarvon to recover. I knew through nurse that the doctors thought her heart was very weak, and I kept thinking what would become of my dear young lady if she was left with a miserable two or three hundred a year. Of course neither Mr. Vivian nor Mrs. Quentin would let her want for anything, but I knew her spirit. She would pinch and screw rather than accept help from them. That meant our parting, for she could never maintain two people on such a pittance, and I did fear my lady would cut her off with a trifle if she held out against Mr. Vivian.

I had a good cry in my own corner of the carriage at the thought of parting with Miss Constance. My life would indeed be desolate. I did love her, and I have always loved her, as she shall know later. But I am running on about my feelings, which nobody cares to be troubled with.

It was broad daylight when we came to Rockborough, and we found a fly from the Royal Hotel waiting for us.

The driver said Dr. Barnes had ordered it the evening before when he was going up to the Tower, where he was to stay the night, for her ladyship had been very bad all day.

Miss Constance was very eager to get on, and fortunately they had sent a good strong horse.

How sweet and fresh everything looked and smelt ! There was a bright sun, and a soft sweet breeze murmuring through the pines and playing on one's cheek like a kindly touch. How I loved that place even then, though I hated coming back to it !

By the time we reached the front door a cooler air brought the honey-sweet scent of the gorse from the moors beyond, and even Miss Constance, absorbed as she was by her impatience to reach her aunt's sick-room, exclaimed, "How

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delicious that scent of the moors is! The dear, rough, free moors, I long to roam over them once more. Ah, Barbara! what is life going to bring us next?"

"Or death, Miss Constance." The words were out before I could stop them.

"Do not say death, Barbara. While there is life there's hope."

As she said the words, we stopped at the hall door. It was wide open, and both Mrs. Wylie and the butler came down the steps. Mrs. Wylie was crying bitterly, and the poor old butler was very near it. "Ah, my dear lambie," said Mrs. Wylie, taking Miss Constance in her arms,—which made me stare, for Mrs. Wylie was a cold, respectful sort of a woman,—“ah, my dear lambie, you are too late! She'll never speak to you again!"

"What!" cried Miss Constance. "She is not dead—dead! Oh, Wylie, don't say she is dead!"

"That she is, my bonnie bairn. She passed away at midnight. She has had a hard struggle for breath; but towards ten she asked if you had come and what o'clock it was. When we told her, she said, in gasps, 'I ought to have sent for her before.' Then she seemed better and more restful. I thought she was in such a nice sleep. And the doctor said she must not be disturbed, but he shook his head when I hoped she would be refreshed. She never spoke or moved again! Never! Come along to the breakfast-room. Dr. Barnes has stayed on to see you, miss, for he said he was sure you would come. Ay, what a change! All in a minute."

Miss Constance walked up the steps and into the hall. Then she dropped down on a chair, looking round in a be-

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wildered way. She stopped only for a minute or two, then she started up and said,—

“I must go to my poor dear aunt.” So Mrs. Wylie led the way and we followed. Miss Constance did not seem to see that any one was with her.

Everything was in beautiful order in the chamber of death, and I never thought the baroness could have looked so grand. The eager, contentious look had gone out of her face, but all the strength and dignity that looked out of it at times were there, as if all that was small and petty had been left behind with life.

As soon as Miss Constance had crossed the threshold and felt the awful “hush” of the room, she stretched out her hand for me and caught my wrist. She had never seen death before, and I could feel how awe-struck she was. Then she drew near and bent to kiss the dead woman's brow, but the terrible icy touch seemed to chill her heart, for she shrank back, and, bursting into tears, cried, “If I had only been in time!”

She knelt down by the bed, crying and shivering. But at last we persuaded her to come away, to take off her travelling things, and have some tea. Then she saw the doctor, who told her that as soon as the bad cold had developed into bronchitis how little hope there was, and soothed her, poor, dear young lady, as well as he could.

Then the rector and his wife came and wanted Miss Constance ever so much to go and stay at the rectory, but she refused to leave the Tower as long as her aunt lay there.

So one thing ran into another, and in less than twenty-four hours it seemed quite natural that her ladyship should be

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lying dead upstairs in her room, so soon do we become used to things. Every one was grieved for Lady Glengarvon, I will say. She did her best for the people about her, and had a real liking for them, too, provided only they did not cost too much. It was just money that she had a craze about saving. She never grudged time or trouble to help any one. Miss Constance often stole in to look at her and put fresh flowers about the room, but she always asked Mrs. Wylie or me to go with her, which was but natural.

Meantime we were busy enough. Lots of those wonderful telegraphs came, ordering this and that. Mr. Vivian—I beg his pardon, Lord Glengarvon—was coming, and Mr. and Mrs. Quentin, and a grand London lawyer with her ladyship's will. So I just took upon myself to write and order real handsome mourning for Miss Constance from Madame Clothilde; I little thought who would pay for it. The servants were to have their mourning at Rockingham, as her ladyship would have wished. So the house was full of business, and I sometimes wondered the poor dead lady upstairs didn't rise up to stop the spending that went on from morning till night. The roasting and the boiling and the stewing, for the new lord brought his valet, and Mr. and Mrs. Quentin a man and a maid, and the London lawyer his clerk, and though we'd have cut off our hands before we'd have shown any disrespect to the dead, there was a wonderful stir in the house.

I was glad to see Mr. and Mrs. Quentin arrive. She was a nice, sensible lady, and such a comfort to Miss Constance. They came the day but one before the funeral, and the night before came Mr. Vivian and the lawyer.

All this time Mr. Morris was very busy doing all sorts of

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things. He often asked to see me, and was killing civil. He was kind, too, but strange and grave. He had grown very brown, and his hands were unsteady, as if he were nervous and uneasy. He told me Macpherson was married and gone.

The night before the funeral Miss Constance dined in her own sitting-room. But Mr. Vivian sent up a note begging her to see him.

She sent him word to come, and they were a good long time talking together.

When I was doing my dear young lady's hair before she went to bed she said suddenly, as if out of her thoughts, "I am afraid I shall be rather distressed to-morrow. Mr. Vivian has been telling me that after the funeral Mr. Sidford, the London lawyer, is to read aloud my aunt's will, and I shall find that she has given me as little as possible, unless I marry according to her wishes, in which case I am to have a large sum. I must say Rex was very nice and gentle. He said I was not to distress myself, for nothing would tempt him to take what ought to be mine and free from any condition. Neither will I accept a fortune from him. He seems to have known all about my poor dear aunt's will. He says that she added a codicil to it when she was in town, and he does not know what is in that."

"I have no fear about you, miss," I said. "Only I should like you to be independent of every one."

"Independent or not, Barbara, I am rather frightened at the outlook of life. I do hope that I shall be able to keep you with me. I should indeed be lonely without you."

With that she began to sob, and the big tears ran down her face. Nor was I a bit better. The thought of losing her was

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just heart-breaking. So we just wept in each other's arms like a couple of girl companions out of the same work-room.

The funeral was next morning ; but that was all I knew of the family affairs of my own knowledge for some days.

* * * * *

The funeral of the late Lady Glengarvon was a grand affair. Besides the invited guests, which were few, there was a large attendance of the tenantry and employés on the farms and works connected with the estates. The rector gave a short address at the grave, which was in the little church-yard beside the old Norman edifice in which the deceased baroness had paid her weekly tribute to public worship. Then all returned to partake of refreshment except the ladies,—Mrs. Quentin and Constance.

Presently they were summoned to be present at the reading of the will, when all met in the library, where the brilliant sunlight of a fine May afternoon made the faded hangings, the moth-eaten upholstery, look more decayed than ever.

In addition to Vivian, Mr. and Mrs. Quentin, Constance, and Mr. Sidford, the only persons present were an old country clergyman, the Rev. George l'Estrange, a fourth or fifth cousin of the deceased baroness, and a rugged fox-hunting squire of the old type, a neighbour, and perhaps the only intimate friend Lady Glengarvon had, who was one of the executors to her will.

Morris with a bag of papers was also in attendance in case any information as to the present state of the property was required.

It was a solemn function, but not without its touch of the

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grotesque, Constance thought. She felt very sad and hopeless in passing through the ranks of those who voluntarily followed her aunt to the grave that morning. She recognised Mr. Musgrave and both his sons; even more, she had exchanged a glance with Alan, an unutterably sad and tender glance, and in her heart she then bade him farewell.

But Mr. Sidford was skimming rapidly over the endless repetitions prefacing the dispositions of the testatrix. First came the legacies to her servants who had lived the greater part of their lives in her service; then a small one in token of sincere regard to the rector; next a thousand pounds to her l'Estrange cousin, whereat the old man's face beamed, a hundred pounds to each executor, a similar sum to "my agent, Mr. Jonathan Morris." After came the larger bequests: "To my niece, Constance Elizabeth Morton, the sum of twenty thousand pounds, always provided that she marries within six months of my decease the gentleman I designed for her, whose name I have told to my executors. If she refuses to comply with this condition, she is to receive a yearly income of two hundred and fifty pounds, derived from my Indian railway stock, and the twenty thousand pounds shall go with the family estates to my successor. To my cousin, Louisa, wife of John Quentin, Esq., D—— Street, London, I give and bequeath the sum of five thousand pounds, now invested in Great Western shares." The voice continued, but Constance lost the sense. The attempt to force her into a marriage, now so detestable, by means of a bribe vexed and distressed her. She did not wish to think of her aunt save with gratitude and kindness. As for the pittance of two hundred and fifty pounds, that did not seem to her ignorance a

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poor provision. She could make it do but, alas! it would not enable her to keep Barbara."

At last the voice ceased, and a pause ensued. Then, to the surprise of all present, Morris stood up and took off his spectacles, with which he began to fidget nervously. His rugged face was very colourless, and his words, in the strong north country accent which Constance knew so well, came slowly but steadily. She observed that he gave one deliberate look full of hatred to Vivian, who was leaning back easily in an arm-chair, with rather a bored expression, as if the whole thing was a twice-told tale to him.

"I have something to state," began Morris, "before this meeting separates, which concerns more or less all those present. I have long been burthened with a secret which, in deference to the wishes of the last Lord Glengarvon, and from respect and regard to the lady whom we mourn to-day, I have kept for more than twenty years. It is this. The late Lord Glengarvon left a legitimate daughter who will dispute Mr. Vivian's right to the title and estates which have apparently devolved upon him."

This extraordinary announcement was received in astonished silence, a look of incredulity creeping over the faces of his hearers, except that of the London solicitor, whose experience of surprises was no doubt vast. Vivian simply raised his eyebrows. "Go on, Mr. Morris," he said, civilly. "I should like to hear some particulars corroborating this strange assertion."

"It will be twenty years ago in July next," Morris went on, "that I was up in London on some business of the late lord's,—for he was then in considerable difficulties,—and

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having procured him a sum of money which he greatly needed, he was very pleased. With his usual kindness and condescension, he asked me to come down and dine with him in a cottage he had for the summer on the river below Richmond. To my surprise I found a lady established there,—a nice, quiet woman,—not pretty, but soft and sweet, and sensible in her way of talking. My lord seemed very happy, and sent for 'his little girl' to show me. I was amazed to see how fond and proud he seemed of the child. I was a good deal distressed, knowing he could ill afford such entanglements. After dinner he said he would tell me the whole story and prove his complete confidence in me. So he did. First, he confessed he had married this girl a year before, away in some East-end church ; that she was of very humble origin, but most respectable ; that her own people thought she had gone wrong with some ordinary racing man ; and now he had grown so fond of her and the child that he wanted to make some sort of provision for them with my help."

Morris then went on to describe Lord Glengarvon's reluctance to disturb or disinherit his sister in favour of a daughter who might be none the happier for the burthen of rank and riches. At last they contrived to settle a small sum in Morris's name as trustee for the use of the late baron's daughter. After this he began to fail in health and spirits, and constantly spoke to Morris about his uneasiness respecting the future of his little girl. Morris grew familiar with the child and the mother, who had many of the superstitions of her class, and was convinced her baby would be lucky because she had a large brown mole between her left shoulder and her neck, and drew Morris's attention to it. A few months be-

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fore Lord Glengarvon died he was at Homburg, from whence he wrote a long letter to his confidant full of his wife and child, begging Morris to stand by them, for he felt he had not much longer to live, and expressing regret for his own cowardliness in not declaring their true status. He could not, however, he confessed, brave his sister's anger and disappointment, as her heart was bound up in the honour and glory of the family. Soon after his return from the Continent Lord Glengarvon died, rather suddenly at the last, in his London rooms, away from his unhappy wife. She survived him between three and four years, during which time Morris remitted her her small income and went to see her at intervals; but she, too, was withdrawn from the troubles of life, having lived in the strictest seclusion, and never knowing her husband's rank.

She had no one to whose care she could confide her child save an elder sister, whom she had not seen since she left her home. This sister Morris succeeded in bringing to the dying woman's bedside, and with some difficulty she was persuaded to take charge of the child, accepting the poor mother's assurances of the little creature's legitimacy for what *she* considered they were worth, and largely influenced by the promise of a fair sum for board and lodging and a situation in London for her husband. This Morris succeeded in procuring. So the heiress of Glengarvon was brought up hardly, though respectably, and considered herself fortunate in having been early taught a good trade. Morris never quite lost sight of her, though he took care she did not see him. For a long time he said his conscience pricked him, but so long as the late baroness lived he would make no sign. Now

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he was determined to tell the whole truth, and leave the matter in the hands of the present company, who were the best judges of what was best for the honour of the family. Morris's statement was shorter and more rigidly restricted to facts than the above, but to Constance, at least, those facts seemed overwhelming. The first to break silence was Sidford, who said, in a dry tone,—

“It is an extraordinary story; but of course it shall be enquired into. We shall need very strong proof, Mr. Morris, of such an unexpected claim.”

“Pray under what name has this young lady been brought up, and where is she to be found?” asked Vivian, quietly.

“She is called Barbara West, and she is in this house.”

“Barbara!” repeated Vivian, with a cynical laugh,—“Barbara, lady's maid and peeress!”

CHAPTER XXIV.

HAVING unburthened his mind, Morris looked round and said very deliberately to Vivian,—

“Do you wish to ask me any questions at present?”

“I certainly do not,” said Vivian.

“Nor I,” added Mr. Sidford. “But I do ask you to put the extraordinary statement you have just made on paper, detailing the proofs you have to show, and let us consider how to deal with the matter.”

“I am prepared for this proposal,” returned Morris, drawing a long, thick envelope from his black bag and handing it to Sidford. “I presume you do not require any further explanations touching the leases and general management of the

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property. If so, every one knows where I am to be found, and I am always at your service. I suppose that, until you have decided on your line of action, this matter had better be kept profoundly dark."

"Of course, of course," said the London lawyer, hastily, whereupon Morris made a rusty sort of bow, and left the room. Then a moment's silence fell upon all those present,—but a sigh, a rustle, an undefined expression of relief, passed through the party assembled. Then Vivian exclaimed,—

"This is an extraordinary turn of affairs, eh?"

"It seems to me like a rather barefaced plot to extract money," said Sidford.

"Not on Barbara's part, that I am quite sure," cried Constance. "She is perfectly innocent of everything, I am certain!"

"You know the young woman, then, Miss Morton?"

"She has been my maid for two years. Such a nice, good girl."

The chain of silence having been loosened, every one talked together eagerly,—the old squire's voice making itself heard above every one's, denouncing, in most unparliamentary language, the plot, the cunning of that snuffy old blackguard Morris, and everything connected with that poor, weak fellow, Glengarvon. Mrs. Quentin rose to leave the room, and Constance followed her example.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Sidford, rising, as did also the other men. "But before you go, let me entreat that no hint of this curious revelation passes your lips. Young ladies are sometimes a little too confidential with their favourite maids, and this should be most carefully avoided."

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"I promise you to keep silence, Mr. Sidford,—more especially as I should not like to disturb Barbara with any hint of possibilities which I am sure will turn out a delusion." So saying, Constance followed Mrs. Quentin (who had hardly spoken since Morris had made his startling speech) to the room which the late mistress of the house had used as her study, or rather her office, for there she had transacted all her business. The windows looked west, and already the sunlight was streaming in with startling brilliancy through the bare, unshaded, unopened windows. The glare and dust and look of neglect pained Constance. "My poor aunt hated the strong afternoon light so much!" she exclaimed, drawing down the blinds. "What a relief to get away from that dreadful room and those solemn men! Dear Mrs. Quentin, what do you think of all this?"

"Think! That is what I cannot do! It is overwhelming!"

"But it cannot be true! It is impossible!"

"I do not know, Constance. There have been incidents quite as extraordinary in the family histories of the nobility and gentry; it is not impossible, but it is improbable. I hope this girl's legitimacy may be disproved. Of course, it would be a great disappointment to Rex, and a very doubtful benefit to Barbara herself. It would be far better for her to be treated as Lord Glengarvon's illegitimate daughter, and given a good dower to enable her to make a respectable marriage in her own station,—and that, I am sure, Rex would give."

"I dare say you are right. But if it is true! Just think of my poor aunt having ruled here by mistake all these years! It is enough to make her turn in her grave!"

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"All I hope is that they will go quietly and sensibly about ascertaining the truth, and not make a *cause celebre* of the case. There is no family history that will stand the pitiless raking up of a trial at law, and poor Glengarvon's life was not too creditable."

As she spoke, Constance thought what good excuse Vivian had for avoiding a rigid scrutiny of his past. Here the door opened, and Barbara, neat, composed, and looking unusually well in her black garments, came into the room.

"If you please, Miss Constance, shall I bring some tea? and will you have it here or in your own room?"

"Have it in your own room, Constance," said Mrs. Quentin, quickly, while she looked searchingly at Barbara.

"Very well, 'm," said that young person, and disappeared.

"Come," said Mrs. Quentin, "let us go into the picture gallery and look at Glengarvon's picture. I want to see if I can trace any likeness to Barbara; there is nothing very marked or we might have noticed it before. But in such things we see very little we do not look for."

On reaching the gallery both stood silently before the late lord's picture for some minutes, then Constance said, "There *is* a look of Barbara about the eyes; indeed, they are quite like; so is the shape of the face."

"It is, but that is all. The l'Estranges are by no means a handsome or refined-looking race. Glengarvon looks both weak and common. Barbara's face is infinitely stronger and more intelligent; but she is thoroughly middle-class in aspect. The sort of likeness between her and her supposed father could only be found if sought for. Come, let us have some tea. Tea always brightens my brain."

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Seated in Constance Morton's little morning-room, the friends soon began to discuss the future.

"You must come and stay with us, Constance. It was too cruel of your aunt to leave you such a miserable income. Why, you cannot live on it. You must really marry some one ; but you need not be in a hurry about it."

"Two hundred and fifty pounds a year seems a good deal of money," said Constance, dreamily. "How much is it a month?"

"You really are frightfully ignorant of business and money. Two hundred and fifty pounds is just twenty pounds sixteen shillings and eightpence a month. How in the world are you to pay rent and food and dress" (in a high key) "and all the hundred and one things living requires out of such a pittance ! I dare say Rex will give you part of that twenty thousand pounds you would have had if you would marry him. I really wish you would. It would end all your difficulties—and mine ; for I think you know, Constance, I should not be quite happy if you were miserable."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Quentin. You comfort me, and I am *very* miserable just now."

"That will pass, believe me."

"I hope so ; but at present I cannot look beyond."

They talked long together, with many a break and many a pause, till Mrs. Quentin went in search of her husband, and to try and find out what was contained in the long formidable document which Mr. Sidford was in the act of unfolding when she and Constance left the room. But she returned unsuccessful. The conference still continued with closed doors.

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At last Vivian himself appeared. He looked much as usual, but for a dark, determined knitting of the brow.

"Tea!" he exclaimed; "give me some. It is just what I want."

"You shall have some fresh," said Constance, ringing.

Barbara came almost at once, and Vivian looked searchingly at her. When she left the room he laughed.

"I hope my lady the baroness will make me a good strong cup. By Jove! what an extraordinary turn affairs have taken! By the way, Lou, you need not tremble for your five thousand. Whatever happens to the freehold lands and hereditaments of Glengarvon, our late respected kinswoman had a right to dispose of her savings and investments. Constance, you do not suppose I am going to swallow up all that respectable lump of money, which ought to be yours unconditionally? Trust me, you shall not be screwed down to that wretched stipend!"

"I know you are very generous, but I shall have quite enough, and it is time enough to talk about such things."

Here Barbara re-entered with the tea, and Vivian could not resist talking to her.

"You are not a Northshire girl, I believe?" smiling graciously.

"No, sir—I mean, my lord," she returned, greatly surprised.

"Don't 'my lord' me just yet. 'There's many a slip,' you know. Where do you come from, then?"

"I was born in Sussex, sir, but I scarcely remember it. I consider myself a Londoner."

"That's good enough for any one. Tell the cook to let us have dinner half an hour earlier. Some of our guests, as well as myself, want to catch the mail train to London."

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"What? To-night?" asked Mrs. Quentin.

"Yes; there's no time to be lost. Things look very queer. I want the most strict examination to be made into this extraordinary story. You know it may be true, and should it stand the test, I shall not fight to enrich the lawyers. I can do without Glengarvon. What shall you do?" to his sister. "Don't stay here to petrify yourselves. Come to town, and be on the spot to know what's going on. Bring the baroness with you, and keep her under your eye. If she succeeds, she'll want a good deal more help and looking after than ever she did as plain Barbara West."

"That's true, Rex."

"I am afraid," said Constance, holding out her hand for his cup, "that you have an enemy in Mr. Morris. For some reason or other he dislikes you. I am sure he does."

"Oh! pooh! that is a mere fancy." He paused, and sat thinking for a minute, and then resumed,—

"I shall discuss many matters with you, I hope, Constance, when we meet in town. You will not refuse to hear me?"

"Mrs. Quentin is so kind as to say I must stay awhile with her. Of course I feel very lonely just now. I could not stay here, and yet it breaks my heart to leave Glengarvon."

A host of painful thoughts crowded on her; and feeling she could not restrain her tears, she rose and hastily left the room.

"It is a shame," said Vivian, looking after her.

"What?" asked his sister.

"That she should be left such a wretched pittance. You know she will not take anything from me."

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"There is no knowing how things may turn out."

"What an infernal old rascal Morris is !"

* * * * *

Vivian gone, Mrs. Quentin grew impatient to return to town, especially as her husband's brief leave of absence obliged him to return without her. As soon, therefore, as she had carried out some directions given her by her brother, and regulated various matters to keep the household going, she fixed an early day for their journey.

The previous afternoon was very breezy, with dashes of rain, and bright sunshine between the showers. Feeling it might be long before she should again see the sweet wild moors, Constance wrapped herself in her rain cloak, and, leaving Barbara deep in packing, she wandered away to the cairn, and sat under its shelter for some time, living the past over again, but shrinking from the future. Fond though she was of Barbara, it seemed a kind of desecration that she should sit in her Aunt Elizabeth's seat,—fill her place she never could ; and even if the extraordinary story told by Morris proved untrue, incapable of proof, she must before long part with her kind, devoted attendant. Then, as ever, her thoughts came round to Alan Musgrave. Was he near her, and yet so far—so immeasurably out of her reach ? Something panting beside her startled her from her dreams, and, turning, she saw the fine old dog, who greeted her with overpowering demonstrations. Behind him stood the elder Musgrave,—a fine specimen of the northern farmer.

"Oh, Mr. Musgrave, I am so glad to see you !" standing up and stretching out both hands to greet him.

"My dear young leddy, and it just warms my heart to see

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you and hear your voice, though we have drifted away from each other these years past. But I do hope from all I hear that you'll be mistress here for many a year after I am dead and gone."

"No, Mr. Musgrave, I do not think that will be. How is Mrs. Musgrave? I hoped she would have come to see me. It has been a sad, sad time."

"She has been poorly and low, though greatly rejoiced to have her boy back, and we are all proud of him."

"Of course you are, and I was proud of my playfellow when I met him at the Duchess of G——s."

"Well, he has just taken his mother away south for a bit. My eldest boy, Humphry, is going to wed a Devonshire lass with bonnie black een; but I'm not going to leave the farm,—the master's eye is sore needed at this season. So the misses and Alan they started the day before yesterday. He'll not come back again, but I am going to say good-bye to him in Lunnon. He's going back in July, sooner than he need; but when he reads the papers and gets letters from his brother officers, it sets him mad to be among the fighting again. He says there's lots to be done out there yet before things are settled down."

"He will be coming back to you Sir Alan Musgrave some day!" exclaimed Constance, her eyes lighting up, and a soft, sad smile playing round her mouth.

"Faith, he'll not be the first Sir Alan in the family, my doo," said the farmer, proudly. "We fought with the Douglasses in the old days in many a Border fray!"

"I know that, Mr. Musgrave. Which way are you going? Walk part of the way home with me." Which he readily

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did, asking and answering questions, and evidently thinking it sure that she would return to them as Lady Glengarvon. When they parted, Constance hurried homeward, overwhelmed with a bitterness too deep for tears.

He was gone,—quite gone,—she should never see him again. How sternly resolute he was ! No tender weakness influenced him. He had grown hard ! Yes, certainly he had. In his place she could not have acted like him. Oh, to see him once, only once more !

But would it not be but a renewal of pain and undermining of strength ? She was herself contemptibly weak. So to compose herself she turned aside to the stables, where she bade farewell to her old shaggy pony, now degraded to carry the boy who brought the post-bag twice a day and do various service in the garden. Then she had to take leave of the dogs. Her own especial favourite had died the winter before, so that heart-break was spared her. The hen-wife came next, and one or two decrepit, old hangers-on, who did what they could in the farmyard. Constance was surprised to find how certainly they all looked forward to her return as mistress of the mansion, and what pleasure the prospect seemed to give them.

She said little to disturb their impression ; it was no matter, —nothing was any matter.

The next morning early they bade a long good-bye to Glengarvon and returned to London.

D—— Street was now the nearest and only approach to home that remained to her, and the next month or six weeks were full of interest and excitement even to Constance, for whom at that time life had lost much of its colour. The ex-

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amination of the proofs brought forward by Morris in favour of Barbara's rights was being prosecuted with great care, and Constance could not help admiring Vivian's serenity under the rather trying circumstances.

"It is really impossible to stay any longer in town," said Mrs. Quentin, one dull, oppressive evening, as she sat fanning herself after dinner.

Their only guests were Constance, now one of the family, and Vivian, who was much less frequently in the house than formerly. "Tell me, Rex, how are matters going? I have heard nothing for several days."

"Against me," said Vivian. "In fact, I have very little doubt in my mind that your 'maid, Barbara,' Constance, is Baroness Glengarvon. I shall not make any fight. I do not care about things as I used, and I much prefer the House of Commons to the respectable retirement of the House of Lords. A certain degree of opposition I must make in order to show the world the rights of the new claimant."

"And what is next to be done?" asked Constance.

"I suppose we must find a respectable firm of solicitors for the plaintiff," said Mr. Quentin.

"And then?" was Mrs. Quentin's query.

"I believe they must bring an action of ejectment against me to recover the estates," replied Vivian. "As to the peerage, Barbara must prosecute her claim in the House of Lords. If they find the proofs satisfactory, they will advise Her Majesty that the claim to the barony be admitted, and their advice is always taken."

"I fancy it will be a long affair," said Mr. Quentin.

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"Yes, not less than a couple of years, I believe. Of course, if I fought it, it might be much longer."

"And how is Barbara to live all this time?" asked Constance. "She cannot be kept in ignorance of her curious change of fortune and position, and she cannot stay on as my lady's maid."

"No," returned Quentin. "I dare say old Morris will supply her with funds. It will be a good spec. for him."

"And during these two years she ought to go to school,—to be taught manners and be generally educated," said Mrs. Quentin. "She seems rather a lady-like girl now, but as Baroness Glengarvon she would be, let us say, a diamond in the rough. Meantime, I should like to go out of town,—not far, for I shall be ravenous for news."

"I fancy Morris will make a push to bring forward the action of ejectment before the long vacation. I am not sure when the appeal to the House of Lords may begin."

Here a servant entered.

"Lord Frederick Maxwell wants to know if he can see you for a few moments, sir," he said to his master.

"Yes, certainly. Won't he come up?"

"No, sir. He is in the dining-room."

"All right; I'll come."

When he had left the room they talked for a few minutes as to the advisability of choosing the Isle of Wight for a summer retreat, also of the curiously dramatic position in which they all stood as regarded Barbara. Mrs. Quentin rose and left the room.

There was a brief silence, then Vivian said, gently, "Constance, this is the first time I have been alone with you since

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that day when I offended you so deeply. I want you to forgive me. I acted like a stupid brute ; but—I don't think I was quite responsible. You showed your contempt for my fraud—for myself—so plainly, and I was so madly jealous of Musgrave."

"Say no more about it, Rex," cried Constance. "I want to forget it. I hate to think of it."

"I do not," he returned, deliberately. "I am properly ashamed of myself ; but those kisses were very sweet, in spite of your indignation, Constance. I am rather down in my luck and in want of consolation. *You* are not too bright yourself, and—I suppose you know Musgrave has gone back to the scene of his triumphs as Captain Musgrave."

"Not exactly. I knew he was going."

"Does he write to you?" hastily.

"Oh, no. He never wrote to me in his life. I met old Mr. Musgrave at Glengarvon and he told me."

"Well, we'll leave him. Listen to me. Don't think I am a craven to come begging at your feet again. But, Constance, you have touched something in my nature I never before knew existed there. Don't imagine I am going to confess my sins and repent. I have never repented, and I do not intend to repent. But we are both adrift. I love you, and I think you might love me—if you let yourself go. Whether I succeed to Glengarvon or not, I can give you a home, which, if you like, you may make a paradise !—at any rate, for a while. Why will you not try to love me, Constance? Let me teach you. If you will be my wife, I undertake that in three or four months you shall forget such a man as Musgrave exists."

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"I do not think you could, Rex. I am awfully sorry I cannot honestly say I will try to love you. I dare not attempt it ; but, believe me, your secret is safe with me. Do not say you never confess. You confessed to me, and——"

Vivian interrupted her with a mocking laugh. "Not voluntarily, Constance. That was the result of my hand being forced. I don't want to be credited with spontaneous candour. Your young hero found out my unfortunate nephew in Paris, and insisted on my making a clean breast of it to you, or he threatened to do so himself. He evidently thought me a blackguard. Yet he was willing to give you up to me, bad as I am."

"You astonish me !" exclaimed Constance. "You must be aware Alan Musgrave knew he and I could never be united. Oh, I do not know what he thought, what he anticipated, when he insisted on your making such a revelation !"

"He probably anticipated the result which has come about," said Vivian. "Be that as it may, Constance, tell me, is there any chance for me? I want you awfully. We might be very happy together."

"I doubt it, Rex ; and yet I am grieved I cannot say yes. Do not imagine I shall change again. You have been good to me and patient ; but though I am grateful to you in some directions, I could never be your wife."

"Well, that is finished," said Vivian, rising. "I am no sentimentalist. I shall not hang round you any longer in meek entreaty. I shall do my best to lose my head or heart, or both, to some other charming woman ; but you have struck deep, and at one time you had a slight weakness for me. Anyhow, I am safe in your hands?"

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"You are indeed, Rex. I only wish you had no secret to keep."

"By Heaven ! so do I ! Still, I do not repent."

"If you please, sir," said the butler, re-entering, "Mr. Quentin would be glad if you would come down to the smoking-room."

"All right ; I'm coming."

"It is good-bye, then, Constance," said Vivian, when the man left the room. "There is no more question of love between us, but, as a friend, command me."

He took her hand, kissed it, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXV.

A FEW days later and "Mrs. Quentin, family, and suite" were settled in a pretty little villa, the garden of which ran down to the sands,—near Ryde,—where all enjoyed the freshness and quiet after hot, dusty, noisy London ; added to which, Constance felt the great relief of Vivian's absence. He had run over to Norway for a brief visit, chiefly to get out of the way of being obliged to take his seat in the House of Lords. "The season is nearly over," he said to his brother-in-law, "and before the next begins I shall know whether I am Lord Glengarvon or not. Meantime, I escape the cross-questions and crooked answers society will force upon one."

Meantime, Morris was very diligent in looking after his *protégée's* interests. Not offensively. Indeed, his bearing and conduct were so dispassionate, so distinctly actuated by a

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wish to do what was right and just, that those well-known and highly-respected solicitors, "Sidford, Ward & Sidford," changed their minds about him, and no longer set him down as a low, scheming, country lawyer, who was advancing a bogus claim to fill his own pockets, but rather a well-intentioned old fellow, who was trying to atone for past weakness.

Things had been so far cleared up that it was considered right to inform Barbara of her prospects, and remove her from her present position.

This task was undertaken by Morris, who made his appearance at Woodbine Cottage, Mrs. Quentin's temporary abode, one wet afternoon, when every one was obliged to stay in-doors.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you, Mrs. Quentin, ma'am. It is not my wish to do so ; but this letter from her late ladyship's men of business will explain." And he drew a letter from his capacious note-book, which he handed to Mrs. Quentin.

It was from Mr. Sidford stating that he thought Mr. Morris ought to have access to Barbara West—as she was now called—in order to inform her of the probable change in her fortunes, and be permitted to remove her to some other place of abode. "As Mr. Vivian was not disposed to resist the claim," continued the letter, "there was little doubt that the matter would, before long, be decided in favour of the late Lord Glengarvon's daughter."

"Of course, Mr. Morris, you can see Barbara at once. I shall be glad when we are all released from our false position. I should, however, be glad to know where you intend to take the—the young person. I presume you have some plan?"

"I am very puzzled as to that question, and I should

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be very grateful if you, madam, could make any suggestion. Until after the long vacation we cannot complete the forms necessary for the recognition of the young lady's rights. As to the choice of a residence, that rests with herself. She is a couple of years older than we thought, and fully of age."

"She might go as parlour boarder in some good ladies' school. I will think about it, Mr. Morris, and speak to you before you go. Holiday time is close at hand, which adds a little difficulty to the undertaking." She rang, and told the servant to show Mr. Morris into the dining-room, and tell Barbara to go to him there.

A few minutes after Constance came into the room, and Mrs. Quentin, looking up from the book she was reading, exclaimed, "Barbara is under fire! That old conspirator, Morris, has arrived to explain matters."

"Poor Barbara! she will be greatly shocked, I am sure. I fancy such a break up of her life, such an extraordinary change of circumstances, is a doubtful good."

"It remains to be seen how she will take it." Mrs. Quentin resumed her book, and Constance, busy with the many thoughts which thronged upon her, stood in the window gazing out on the leaden water without seeing it.

Once or twice Mrs. Quentin glanced at her, wondering how long she would stand there, when suddenly the door opened, and Barbara, looking flushed and disturbed, came in.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Morton, for taking the liberty," she said. "Would you mind coming with me to Mr. Morris? I am afraid the poor old gentleman is gone off his head, but he seems quite harmless, only I don't know what to say to him."

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"Go with her, my dear," said Mrs. Quentin. And Constance immediately complied.

"Do you know, miss," said Barbara, when they got out into the passage, "he has been insisting that I am not the child of my own father and mother, but of the late Lord Glengarvon, that I ought to have been the baroness all this time, and that Mr. Vivian has no right to the title or estates. I think he has gone crazy with his hatred of Mr. Vivian. Do come, miss!"

"Yes, Barbara; but I don't think Mr. Morris in the least off his head. You must hear all he has to say quietly and attentively."

Morris was standing by the table, on which lay various folded papers and memoranda.

"I am glad to see you, Miss Morton, ma'am," he said, "for I cannot get Miss—Miss Barbara to heed or understand. Will you please tell her that I have not lost my head, that you know I am speaking the truth, and that she *is* Baroness Glengarvon of Glengarvon?"

Thereupon Morris recommenced his narrative, and after many disputes and outspoken objections, Constance's comments and quiet assurances seemed to make an impression on Barbara,—the thin end of the wedge, conviction, began to insert itself.

"And what does Mr. Vivian say?" she asked at last. "Doesn't he think me a horrid, ungrateful girl, to take his fortune and title from him?"

"No, Barbara. All he wants is to be sure of your rights, then he is quite ready to make way for you."

"He was always a nice, good, generous gentleman."

Barbara : Lady's Maid and Peeress

Morris took a large pinch of snuff, and uttered a half-suppressed groan.

"But, Miss Constance, I could not take this money and property and everything. I should be just miserable. I could not behave myself like a great lady. Every one would point at me, and the elegant ladies and gentlemen would jeer and say clever, witty things about my standing by with a saucerful of pins to hand to Madame when she was trying on the ladies's dresses. Why, I know how I have heard them talk of new people,—all the funny, contemptuous things they used to say of that big brewer who was made a lord, the year before I left Madame. Why, what is to prevent me from dividing the fortune between Miss Constance and Mr. Vivian? *They* would know how to use and to spend it."

"Mr. Vivian would, certainly," said Morris, drily.

"No, Barbara, you could not do that. You are bound to keep what the law gives you, and pass it on to your next heir."

"It is downright cruel," resumed Barbara, "to take a poor, ignorant girl away from her friends and all she is accustomed to and put her where everything is strange and fearsome, where nobody wants me, to say nothing of showing me that my dear, good mother was only shamming all the time, though my *mother* she will be to the end of the chapter! I don't care so much about father, though he never was bad."

"Then, Barbara, you must remember your own real dead mother; she loved you dearly, and you owe it to her to show that she was a good, respectable woman by taking the position due to Lord Glengarvon's legitimate daughter."

"There's something in that," said Barbara, putting her

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handkerchief to her eyes. "What poor things men are, to be sure! If my lord and father, as you say he was, had acted straightforward, and had the pluck to acknowledge the woman he loved, there would have been no trouble at all. I should have been brought up fit for my station. *Then* I should have liked it well enough. Oh, Mr. Morris, you lawyer gentlemen are so clever! Couldn't you make out it's Miss Constance that ought to be my lady? I don't say I wouldn't like some money to make father and mother comfortable in a cottage, with a garden and bees (for father's getting past work with rheumatism), and to help the boys on, but what's to become of *me*? all alone, with not a creature to be a friend, nor one soul that won't look on me as an intruder?"

And poor Barbara broke down, sobbing bitterly.

"Don't, my dear Barbara," cried Constance; "you exaggerate things. I was always fond of you. I respect your character, your sense, and, if you will have me, I will be your friend, your sister, and do the best I can for you."

"Will you? Will you promise me that?"

"I will, indeed."

"Then do let me kiss you, dear Miss Constance." And she threw her arms round her ex-mistress's neck, and clung there for a second or two.

"Well, I must say, few would have shed so many tears on succeeding to a title and a rent-roll of some twenty-five thousand a year," said Morris, with a sniff; "and I must also say I thought I should get heartier thanks for a piece of service such as few men have done in a lifetime."

"Oh, I do thank you, Mr. Morris! And if you will show me, how I should like to prove my gratitude!"

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"I don't want anything. I have my reward."

"You may count on Mrs. Quentin, too, Barbara," resumed Constance, "for all possible help. As a kinswoman she will recognise that you have a claim on her. Let me call her in to our councils, for it will not be pleasant for you to live on here after you know your real position."

* * * * *

Mrs. Quentin's wide acquaintance with all sorts of women, from the wealthy grandee to the struggling schoolmistress, enabled her to "place" Barbara temporarily with a couple of ladies who did not break up their establishment in holiday time because of some small Indian pupils whose people were across the wide ocean, and here she was escorted by Mrs. Quentin herself.

"You know," said that lady to Constance, "I hate it all, and deeply resent this intrusion of an outsider (as she is) into our unlucky house. But the poor girl herself is not to blame, and we must not let her fall into the hands of designing fortune-hunters. Still, I am awfully sorry for Rex, and I think he is behaving very well. You must go and see 'Miss l'Estrange.' I have made her take the family name. She seems to cling to you very tenaciously. By the way, I had better look out for a maid for you, Constance."

"No, dear Mrs. Quentin; I shall be my own maid in future."

"Pooh! Nonsense! You need not begin to screw in that way; I will settle the matter for you."

Time fled past swiftly, and soon it seemed to Constance that the courts were again sitting, and they were in the midst of the formalities necessary to make public the accession of

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Barbara, Frances l'Estrange, to the title and estates of her father, the late Lord Glengarvon. The case was quite a God-send to those social atoms who were by the duties of office and the necessities of business obliged to brave the fogs of a London November. It gave them something to talk about, and they talked. Every one agreed that Vivian was a fine fellow, and had behaved remarkably well. The new baroness was a terrible fright, like a whitewashed negress, and always used her knife in preference to a fork ; but for all that Vivian was going to drop that charming Miss Morton and marry his cousin, the lady's maid.

Mrs. Quentin was a good deal annoyed—more than she cared to admit—by the whole business, and carried off her family for the winter to Torquay, leaving her husband to temporary bachelorhood. This winter and spring were trying to Constance. The sense of belonging to no one, of having no claim on any one, oppressed her with a sense of loneliness and insignificance. Musgrave seemed to have vanished out of her life. Once there was a mention of him in the papers in connection with a rising in the hill tribes in the direction of Cashmere, when he had distinguished himself, but he gave no sign. Vivian, too, never came to visit them, and Constance felt that she was the stumbling-block of offence which kept him at a distance. She went to town two or three times during this period chiefly to see Barbara, and found her fairly content, and working hard to fit herself for her new place in life. Her only source of comfort was the hope of persuading Constance to live with her as her guide, philosopher, and friend. But as yet Constance would make no promise.

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As Vivian offered little or no opposition to Barbara's claim, the case was by no means so prolonged as at first anticipated, and early in the May following, affairs being nearly completed, Constance read the following lengthy epistle :

“MY DEAR MISS CONSTANCE,—I really cannot write it without the ‘Miss,’—all the business about settling poor dear father and mother—I mean uncle and aunt—isn't it confusing?—is finished. I did enjoy furnishing their cottage,—which is quite a good house, with a garden where uncle can dig—when the rheumatism lets him—and near Barnes Station, so that Charlie can go up to his office every morning. It is a pleasure to see mother's delight with her furniture, for though simple and suited to the house, it is as good and solid as I could buy. Joe started for Sydney last week, and Mrs. Sidford's correspondent out there is to look out for a share in some cattle run—or something of that kind. Mr. Sidford is a nice sensible man, and very good to me, but I find it very useful being of age,—indeed, close on to twenty-two,—for no one can force me to do what I don't like, so when Mr. Sidford and I have any difference of opinion my will is law. At the same time, dear Miss Constance, I am frightened to deal with all the money that is mine, until I understand about it. Mrs. Sidford came to see me last week—she is very grand, much grander than you or Mrs. Quentin, or poor dear Lady Glengarvon—and she talked ever so much to me about setting up an establishment. It just made my hair stand on end to think of it! Now this brings me to what I want to ask you. And, my dear, dear Constance,—there now!—think well before you refuse me.

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“The ladies I am staying with have been wise and good, and I have been just in luxury, but I don't feel as if I should like to stay any longer. As for going to stay at Glengarvon or setting up a house in town, I couldn't do it. It seems to me that I must have a quiet time to practise being a lady before I perform in public. Now it seems to me that the best place for this sort of thing would be the Continent, and if you would make me happy you would come with me and be my friend and instructress! I'll do whatever you like, and go where you like. Going about and seeing remarkable places would be the best education for me. Then I should feel more sure of myself, and we should gradually get to know people. I don't want you to promise anything that would be bad for you, but I should like you to make your home with me. I'd make it home indeed! You were always a sister to me as well as a real good mistress as I could look up to as to my real superior (one of those 'as's' is wrong!). I find composition about the hardest of my lessons. Now think of this, my dear young lady, and consult with Mrs. Quentin. She will give us the best advice. I'll be just too happy if you'll come. We might get away in a fortnight and stay in Paris till the fine warm spring days come. I do long to shop in Paris and see the real French millinery in its own country.

“Now do write as soon as you have talked things over. I shall be counting the hours till I get your letter.

“Ever your loving friend,

“BARBARA GLENGARVON.

“Isn't it strange for me to be signing like that?”

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This epistle caused much discussion and *pour parlers*. Mrs. Quentin, however, was on Barbara's side. "Really," she said, "that young woman has a great deal of common sense. I fear you are both rather young to go wandering about at your own sweet wills, and you must be very careful with whom you fore-gather. Poor Barbara will be a bait for fortune-hunters for many a day."

"I fancy we shall be extremely quiet for many months. We shall want to study, to improve ourselves."

"I think our new baroness shows both sense and taste in wanting to annex Constance. I confess I am on her side," said Mr. Quentin. "They might make themselves very comfortable at Meurice's for a couple of months and then go off on their travels."

Ultimately a frank acceptance of Barbara's offer was despatched, and received with the greatest joy.

With the magic of ready money preparations were quickly accomplished. A highly-recommended German travelling-maid, who spoke most European languages, and a polyglot courier were engaged, and Barbara, with a sense of security and coming success, set forth on her quest of knowledge, refinement, and aristocratic manners.

Her joy at securing the company of her much-loved mistress and model reacted beneficially on Constance, who felt that with Barbara she would be of real use and find a real home.

So with pleasant anticipations, and in hearty sympathy, they bid farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Quentin one bright morning soon after Easter, and steamed away to "fresh ~~fields~~ and pastures new."

words

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CHAPTER XXVI.

A BRIGHT, fresh, soft April day in beautiful Paris ! There is scarce a fairer, a more enlivening scene, and here the young Lady Glengarvon and Constance Morton found themselves nearly three years after they had left England, as recorded in the last chapter.

It had been a peaceful period, at first of profound quiet, as Barbara's nervous shyness and dislike to make new acquaintances condemned them almost to the condition of recluses.

It took all the tact and influence which Constance possessed to struggle successfully against this tendency. Gradually, as her mind developed, and her interest in the various new scenes she visited, their history and characteristics, drew Barbara from thinking and troubling about herself, she grew more indifferent respecting the impression she made upon others, and became, consequently, more at ease. Acquaintances gathered rapidly round them, and before long suitors for the hand and fortune of the baroness presented themselves, but in vain.

Barbara laughed at the idea of ever marrying. "No, Constance," she said, "I have had my lesson, and I shall never forget it ! I don't care to speak on the subject, but I have often pictured to myself what Jim Macpherson's state of mind must have been when he found that the woman he jilted was Baroness Glengarvon ! It was altogether a providential up-shot to my only love-affair, however. It is hard enough to fit myself for the society I must mix with, but how could I ever

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have dragged Macpherson after me? People would put up with me, but not with him. What rings and pins and studs he would have stuck all over himself! Now, *my* work brought me in contact with ladies always, and I know what they are like. I believe it takes generations to make a thorough-bred one. I know I'll never be an elegant gentlewoman, but I can be quiet and inoffensive, and I begin to think I'll get on. Oh, how delightful it is to have money! I never thought I should enjoy it so much, and, indeed, it is a joy to help my poor neighbours."

"I know that, Barbara; but you must come and live at Glengarvon. There is nothing like the presence of the proprietor of a large estate for promoting the welfare of the tenantry."

"Well, I don't feel quite up to it yet. Poor old Mr. Morris is looking after everything. Have you seen his last letter? Mrs. Wylie is settled in a pretty little place between Woodford and the village. The butler lives with his son. I couldn't have the old servants I used to eat with and live with in my service now! Let me get a stranger. Let me feel my feet a little, and I'll make my real home at Glengarvon, and do my duty; but for the present I want a little longer time of freedom and cultivation."

This conversation took place in London the previous spring, when the baroness had paid a visit of a couple of months to that city, partly on business, partly to see her uncle and aunt.

Mr. and Mrs. Quentin urged her strongly to remain, but she insisted on returning, and chose to spend the autumn in the Tyrol and the winter in Vienna.

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Her only cause of dissatisfaction with Constance was her avoidance of Vivian. But that gentleman rarely called, and made no advances. He seemed absorbed in politics, and made rather a prominent figure in the House of Commons.

The friends had now paused for a week or two in Paris on their way to London.

And how was it with Constance through these quiet years? She would have told any one who had questioned her that all was well, better far than she once dared to anticipate. Yet there was a soft twilight gravity pervading her manner, her thoughts, her views, which does not gather in a well-filled mind, a contented heart.

Her life had no particular aim, her energy was without an object. She was much admired, and more than one sought her in marriage, but the generality of men felt they were nothing to her, that no man ever would be.

She had watched with infinite interest for Musgrave's name in the Military News, with which the English Press palpitated during the years immediately succeeding the Mutiny, and on rare occasions she found it. He had been appointed to a native cavalry corps. He was again wounded in some expedition against a body of mutineers which still held out. He was evidently distinguishing himself in his profession, but probably she would never see him again. Again and again she wished she could forget him,—that she could make a home of her own,—for Constance was a woman peculiarly fitted by nature for home and wedlock and maternity, though unaware of it herself.

The beautiful April morning with which this chapter opened tempted the comrades to drive early to the Bois de

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Boulogne, and, on reaching the lakes, they alighted and walked along the Neuilly side of the water under the pine-trees, until, feeling the delicious languor of early spring relaxing their muscles, they sat down to rest near the boat-house.

"I fancy that a fortnight in town will be enough," said the baroness, suddenly out of her thoughts. "I feel an unusual desire to go to Glengarvon."

"I am very glad. Pray yield to it."

"Yes, I shall. I should think that Madame Dulac will have our dresses finished by this day week."

"I suppose so." Then silence fell upon them.

"Do look at these two men coming towards us. How unmistakably English!" exclaimed the baroness, indicating two gentlemen, one old, with large white moustache, the other perhaps thirty, tall, rather gaunt, and deeply embrowned.

"English—yes,—and soldiers, I am sure!" returned Constance, watching them as they approached. "Why, Barbara," suddenly grasping her companion's wrist and growing very white, "it is, it must be Alan Musgrave."

Before Barbara could reply the gentlemen were abreast of them. Constance was breathless. Would they pass? Was it possible Alan did not recognise her? Their eyes met, a dark flush rose to his cheek as he paused, allowing his companion to go on.

"Miss Morton,"—an instant's hesitation,—"Lady Glengarvon! this is a most unexpected pleasure." He spoke in a nervous, staccato manner.

"Mr. Musgrave, I am so glad to see you!" cried Barbara,

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heartily, while Constance stood, pale and silent, behind her, for both had risen. "We fancied you in the wilds of India!"

"Are you quite well?" asked Constance, her questioning eyes drawing his to her.

"Oh, well enough, or will be after a month of Europe. We arrived here last night, and I little thought you were so near. Let me introduce my friend, General MacDougal." And he beckoned the old gentleman, who had paused and turned to look back.

The conversation ran on on ordinary topics until the baroness bethought her of luncheon, and they went in search of the carriage.

Barbara invited Musgrave and his friend to luncheon. They were, however, engaged, but they exchanged addresses, and promised to call the following day.

Lady Glengarvon and her friend drove along for some time in silence, and then the former exclaimed, "How changed Mr.—no, Captain Musgrave is! He looks ever so much older, and as haughty and stern as a duke!"

"The very few dukes I have seen were neither one nor the other," said Constance, laughing. "Alan was always grave and thoughtful, and, I suppose, the responsibilities of command have made him more serious."

"I must say he is very good-looking and distinguished-looking, but not up to Mr. Vivian's mark, in my mind, Constance."

"And in mine there is no man I have ever seen comparable to him," was the reply, in a low, soft tone, as if speaking to herself. "It is my destiny, no doubt, to spend my life far apart from his; he has probably long ago blotted out his early

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fancy,—ah! it was more than a fancy for me,—but I will never pretend that any one in the world can ever be to me what Alan Musgrave was,—nay, is! Not that I am going to let him know it. I have some self-respect, Barbara.”

“Don't have too much, my dear friend. You might make a terrible mistake,—a fatal one,” said Barbara, looking wistfully into her companion's face, her kind heart touched by the animation, the rich colour, the look of youth which had come back to her face. She did not speak her thoughts, however, and after a prolonged pause she said,—

“I shall ask them both to dinner. That General Mac—something is very nice; I like old soldiers.”

It was with very mixed feelings that Constance dressed for dinner the following day. Pleasure was uppermost, but it was chequered by a keen sense of the necessity for self-control, for preserving a quiet, kindly, sisterly tone.

Lady Glengarvon had no difficulty in finding a few additional guests,—an attaché and his wife, friends of Mrs. Quentin's, a cosmopolitan Hungarian, fluent in many languages, a Royal Navy officer, on a brief holiday to the French capital. Constance was placed next to Colonel Musgrave, and talked easily and cordially with him, but she rarely met his eyes. From his conversation she gathered that he had been promoted to an important staff appointment, obtaining a short leave to arrange important private affairs before taking up a long spell of official work in India.

Then their talk drifted away to topics less personal. Neither spoke of Glengarvon beyond enquiries for the Musgrave family. He was evidently posted up in the great changes which had taken place in the Glengarvon succession, but

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both avoided the subject. Constance fancied that Musgrave watched how his hostess acquitted herself and felt proud of her friend. She was quiet and self-possessed, rather silent ; but the little she said was sensible and to the point.

The evening passed pleasantly. The attaché's wife and the Hungarian sang duets, and he played wild national airs. Musgrave's friend, the general, fell captive to Constance, and they talked together with much animation. The attaché was delighted to have the last news from a remote Indian district.

"General MacDougal tells me you leave to-morrow for London," said Constance, as Musgrave said good-night.

"He does. I am going to stay on a few days, so I hope to see you again, if—if I may."

"Oh, yes, of course. Good-night."

* * * * *

Constance thought she was rather out of luck the following day. When returning from a visit at Passy, Lady Glengarvon informed her that both General MacDougal and Colonel Musgrave had called,—the former to take leave,—when he had promised to pay the baroness a visit in the course of the summer. She did not, however, mention that Musgrave had outstayed the veteran, and had indulged in a somewhat confidential conversation.

"I think I shall go and look at those bronzes again, Constance," said Lady Glengarvon, as they rose from luncheon the following afternoon. "They would be a great addition to the dining-room at the Tower."

"I think they would. I will go and dress."

"I don't fancy you ought to go out, Constance. You are hoarse, and coughed a good deal this morning."

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"Why, Barbara, you are dreaming! I am quite well!"

"Well, dear, the fact is, I do not want you!"

"Ah, traitress! you are stealing away to buy somebody a costly present!"

"I'll not say yes or no to that," said the baroness, laughing. "You stay at home, like a good girl, and read the new *Blackwood*, which has just come. I will not be long away."

"Very well," was the obliging response.

As soon as Barbara drove away, Constance settled herself on a sofa near one of the windows, through which the bright sunshine came, tempered by the sun-blinds. It was a pleasant, luxurious room, redolent of lily of the valley and other spring flowers, but Constance could not fix her mind on her book. The past would thrust itself before her, and the sweet, sad memories of the old days thrilled her with exquisite pain. Suddenly the door was thrown open, and a waiter announced, "Monsieur le Colonel."

Constance started up, not realising that it could be Musgrave till he stood before her.

"I could not imagine who Monsieur le Colonel was!" she exclaimed, smiling, as she gave him her hand. "Lady Glen-garvon is out."

"So they told me," and he drew a chair near her. "She is rather a wonderful woman," he went on. "How well you must have trained her! She is quite lady-like and presentable."

"Pray remember there never was a tinge of vulgarity about Barbara, and we were quite companions, you remember——"

She stopped abruptly—the colour rising to her brow—at this thoughtless allusion to a time she never meant to mention.

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"Remember! Yes, I remember every hour of my life at that time. How excited you were at the idea of having a maid all to yourself! Ay, and I well remember the day I first saw her when we met at the cairn!—and parted! God! what an agony it was!"

"It was, indeed, the beginning of a troubled time," returned Constance, growing very white. "Do you know I have been trying to write an account of our strange history—and Barbara helps me."

"Ay, your late aunt was very unjust to you, unjust to the last. Do you know I have read the marriages for years,—looking for yours—with Vivian."

"That was never probable, but lately quite impossible. Do you think I could have vowed my life to a man I did not love, and who told me without the slightest remorse of the extraordinary fraud by which he possessed himself of his cousin's fortune?" cried Constance, changing colour. "I know *you* forced Rex Vivian to tell me, therefore I do not hesitate to speak of it."

"He was not worthy of you!" Musgrave rose, took a turn down the room and back, then stopped, leaning his shoulder against the window, his eyes downcast, and said in a low tone, "I have gone through some rough days, some fierce fights, but I never felt a coward before. Even at the risk of seeming presumptuous, I must speak. Have patience with me, Constance. When I knew that your aunt had left you so ill-provided, when I found that month after month passed and there was no announcement of your marriage to Vivian or any one else, and when I was given an appointment which even as a married man would enable me, with care, to live like a

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gentleman, a faint, delicious hope dawned within me. I was not unknown to the heads of my profession. I should not drag you down. I could offer you a home. Constance, is there any glimmer of the affection you once gave me still left? Could I rekindle it? You do not know how the thought of you has haunted me, how the desperate longing for you has made my heart ache. When I think of the ineffable sweetness of those days when you loved me as brother or lover,—you hardly knew which,—I tremble for the result of this last throw. Constance!”

He made a step forward and held out his arms.

“And shall I not be a burden to you, Alan, as Rex used to say?” cried Constance, rising and obeying her heart's impulse to give herself to his ardent embrace.

“What matters what he said. What is he or the whole world to us so long as we have each other?” he whispered. “My life, my darling, if you love me put your arms round my neck as you did when we parted years ago, tell me that I am still the same to you as in the old times, when my love for you was too strong even for the sense of honour which ought to have sealed my lips.”

And the soft arms clung round him, the sweet mouth pressed a tender kiss on the red-brown, sunburnt throat against which her face lay. It was so natural to kiss him! She felt such a sense of heavenly rest in his embrace! After a confused interval of broken exclamations, quick sighs, and passionate caresses, they began to realise the sober certainty of waking bliss.

“Now, Alan, that you have really committed yourself beyond recall,” said Constance, smiling, as they sat side by

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side, "I have something to tell you which will perhaps account for the readiness with which I agreed to let you hamper yourself with a poorly-dowered wife. When my aunt's will was read it appeared that she left me twenty thousand pounds if I married Rex Vivian. If I did not it was to go to her successor. Now Barbara was her successor, so she had the money, and most generously settled it on *me* ! So I am *not* a penniless lass wi' a lang pedigree."

"Twenty thousands pounds !" cried Alan. "By Jove ! I am glad I didn't know ! I should never have had the face to ask you if I did."

"That would have been foolish and unkind," whispered Constance. "What matter on which side the money is so long as we have it."

"What will your friends the Quentins say to you, my darling, for your choice of a soldier of fortune ?"

"That I have done well ! A man who can lead men can best take care of a woman !"

"I hope you understand each other, and there is no more chance of a fatal mistake," said Barbara, who had entered unperceived. "I fancy it is all right, so we will get away to Glengarvon as fast as we can, and inaugurate my reign there with a joyous wedding, at which dear Mr. and Mrs. Musgrave can show their happy presence. But, oh, Constance, how I shall miss you !"

THE END.

